THE JOURNAL OF THE INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

The Women's Quarterly

SUMMER 2002 ◆ NO. 32

Transgender Chic

Jonathan V. Last and *Charlotte Allen* take us to the newest frontier in gender politics

Also Inside:
Judy Bachrach
Betsy Hart

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Diary

Confessions of a Former Girl

AS A FORMER GIRL, I must take issue with much of Rachel Simmons' best-selling *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, wherein Simmons interviews far too many adult women who are still bitter about having been victims of bullying girls, circa K-12.

"Today, in counseling, Janet feels certain that resolving her feelings about Cheryl will help her cope with lifelong feelings of low self-esteem," is a typical Simmons sentence. Cheryl, you see, had dropped Janet, now in her forties (!), when they were in, um, junior high.

Simmons defines the "hidden culture of aggression in girls" as "relational aggression"—that is, they don't push and shove like boys might but rather they manipulate. They may drop a girl socially, make fun of her shoes, or be nice to her sometimes but not at other times. Girls resort to this rather than direct aggression because they have been raised to be "caregivers."

"The culture derides aggression in girls as unfeminine," writes Simmons. "'Bitch,' 'lesbian,' 'frigid,' and 'manly' are just a few of the names an assertive girl hears. Each epithet points out the violation of her prescribed role as caregiver."

A *Newsweek* article on *Odd Girl* and other recent "mean girl" books, most notably Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen Bees and Wannabees*, placed these in the tradition of a previous "wave of troubled-girl books" such as *Reviving Ophelia*. "Like these [earlier] 'studies,' these new ones capitalize on parental dread, portraying school, especially junior high, as littered with beaten-down and backstabbed girls."

Girls can be cruel—I know that—but the bullying is nothing like the epidemic Simmons claims. "These books go way beyond what we have data on," *Newsweek* quotes William Damon of the Stanford Center on Adolescence as saying.

Indeed, Simmons, in her chilling picture of life among schoolgirls, several times invokes the movie *Heathers*, an eighties film about popular girls, all calling themselves Heather, which contains such memorable lines as, "She's my best friend. God, I hate her," and includes a faked suicide. Simmons seems to regard this as reporting.

Newsweek suggests that there are girls who thrive, despite not being the most popular "alpha girls." "Jen" in the article personified these "gamma girls," who are resilient and apparently quite nice. She once wore a huge orthodontic contraption, which—gasp!—some girl bullies stole and hid from her during lunch. Jen seems not to have been permanently scarred by this episode of bullying: "I was such a nerd," she says cheerfully, thereby indicating that she is not a candidate for a bitter session with Ms. Simmons.

Simmons reports that girls from ethnic and poor backgrounds haven't absorbed the "nice girl" ethos that paradoxically makes girls not so nice. "Like the middle-class girls who use emotional alliances, these girls make pacts to defend each other physically." Alas, however, "Because it is linked to their marginalization, their directness cannot serve as a model for overcoming girls' sense of powerlessness." Come again?

As a former girl, I know that high school is hell (and also heaven), and I'd never belittle the difficulties of being a teenager or pretend that there aren't female bullies—a dozen girls in my prep school were sent home for an incredibly cruel act of bullying. But I'd suggest that we ought to do the very thing Simmons doesn't want us to do—demand that girls try to be decent people. Nice people, in other words.

"Nice" is anathema to Simmons—for her, the word, frequently ridiculed in *Odd Girl*, reinforces the "caregiver" mentality that created all the problems. But helping adolescents to become nice and decent—to be ladies, in other words, or gentlemen, if boys—is the only thing that can keep them from turning junior high into *Lord of the Flies*. Herewith I thank my mother for trying, often in vain, to make me be nice to a lot of dorky people. And I repent of hurling "Knutsonballs" (wadded up, wet toilet paper) into the dorm room of a girl of that name for nights on end in the ninth grade. Lordy, I'm glad that Simmons didn't find her, though she's probably a CEO somewhere. Note to Simmons: Many former girls chose to become adults.

~ Charlotte Hays

P.S. Don't miss Betsy Hart's take on another "mean girl" book on page 17.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Women's Quarterly

SUMMER 2002 ◆ NO. 32

GRACE PAINE TERZIAN
Publisher

CHARLOTTE HAYS
Editor

MITZI H. PEPALL
Art Director

IVY MCCLURE STEWART
Senior Editor

MARGARET R. CARROLL
Production Manager

INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM
Nancy M. Pfotenhauer, *President*

Board of Directors:
R. Gaull Silberman, *Chairman*
Heather R. Higgins, *Vice Chairman*
Carol T. Crawford, Kimberly O. Dennis,
Wendy Lee Gramm, Sally C. Pipes,
Nancy M. Pfotenhauer

Directors Emeritae:
Lynne Cheney, Midge Decter,
Elizabeth Lurie, Kate O'Beirne,
Louise V. Oliver

P. O. Box 3058
Arlington, Virginia
22203-0058
Tel: 703/558-4991
Toll Free Line: 800/224-6000
Fax: 703/558-4994
E-mail: info@iwf.org
Website: www.womensquarterly.com

The Women's Quarterly (ISSN:1079-6622) is published by the Independent Women's Forum, a nonprofit Section 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

The opinions and views expressed in *The Women's Quarterly* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Independent Women's Forum. Permission to reprint any article must be obtained from the publisher. Submissions are welcome and can be mailed or faxed to the editor. Annual cost is $30 and includes a subscription to *Ex Femina*. Outside the U.S., add $6. Back issues of *The Women's Quarterly* are available for $5.

© 2002 Independent Women's Forum
All rights reserved.

IN *THIS* ISSUE

Diary: ***Charlotte Hays*** on alpha girls and the harm they don't do 2

She Ain't Necessarily So: ***Jonathan V. Last*** takes us to the brave new frontier in sexual politics—Transgender Chic 4

When Harry Became Sally: ***Charlotte Allen*** goes to a transgender symposium and tries to sort out the legal complexities 7

The Token Man: ***John Zardi*** checks out the dwindling "alternative families" section at Politics & Prose 10

TWQ Interview: ***Karen Stabiner*** makes a case for single-sex education in her new book *All Girls* 11

The Odd Couple: ***Leonard Sax*** wonders why the Bush administration is getting all the blame (and credit) for something Hillary Clinton and Kay Bailey Hutchison did for the public school system 14

Karlyn Bowman's **Poll-Pourri** on teens and tattoos 16

Mean Like Me: Feminist author Phyllis Chesler is just now discovering that women can be mean. ***Betsy Hart*** argues that Chesler's book says nothing new (to anyone past junior high) 17

The Pajama Party That Failed: ***Shannon James*** explains why the ratings-starved Oxygen network is gasping for air 19

Becky Sharp Comes to America: ***Judy Bachrach*** shows how fallen editrix Tina Brown is the reincarnation of Thackeray's seductive, social-climbing heroine 22

Disarming Women: ***Richard W. Stevens, Hugo Teufel III,*** and ***Matthew Y. Biscan*** put forth the novel notion that guns are good for women 25

Correspondence 29

One Last Observation: ***Renee A. James*** ponders the female obsession with "outfits" 31

"I'm sorry, sir, but I don't think we stock genetically modified foods."

Cover drawing by John Springs. Cartoon (above) by Charles Jaffé

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She Ain't Necessarily So

Jonathan V. Last takes us to the newest frontier in sexual politics—Transgender Chic.

If Tina Brown were alive today, we wouldn't be able to escape talk of transgender buzz. The eighties were the gay decade. The nineties belonged to lesbian chic. Now it's a transgendered world. We have seen the rise of the transgender movie—*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995), *Flawless* (1999), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001)—and, more recently, the appearance of transgender TV characters on *Friends* and *The Education of Max Bickford*, and even the transgender mini-celebrities Boy George, RuPaul, and Ben Schatz (former advisor to President Clinton, cum drag-apella sensation).

Transgender people were once the forgotten stepchildren of sex interest groups. When the gay-rights revolution erupted at Stonewall in 1969, the transgender set wasn't even an afterthought. Twenty-five years later, the group has been completely embraced by the gay-rights crowd, with the word "transgender" tucked into the mission statement of every advocacy group in the cosmos, from the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund to the Human Rights Campaign.

Other groups have been more circumspect. Last winter an argument broke out on *Ms.* magazine's Internet bulletin board when it was revealed that one of the most strident male-haters was a transgender woman, which is to say someone who was born male. Many of the "WBWs" (Woman Born Woman) wanted to exclude the "WBMs" (Woman Born Man) from the talks, presumably because in the victimology sweepstakes, no group, no matter how marginal, is allowed to feel another's pain.

Here it may be helpful to provide a little taxonomy to readers who don't keep up with such things. "Transgen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

der" is an umbrella term which applies to people who aren't entirely happy with the sex into which they were born. Some of them manifest as cross-dressers—either full- or part-time. Others feel the need to actually live their lives as members of the opposite sex. Members of this subgroup are referred to as "transsexuals." Some transsexuals merely dressup, some take hormone therapy to alter their appearances, and some go the drastic route of surgical alteration. More on that later.

There doesn't seem to be much reliable data on transgender people. The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition website claims that between 2 and 3 percent of the American population is transgender and that about 10 percent of them are homosexual. The group Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays says, "The largest subgroup of transgender persons is crossdressers who are mainly heterosexual men, although there are also women who crossdress." But beyond that—What's the racial distribution? What's the breakdown of men vs. women? What percentage of transsexuals seek surgery?—it's all mist, and many transgender groups are intent on not giving out hard data. Persistent attempts to contact transgender-rights groups—including the Human Rights Campaign—were rebuffed. And members of the scientific community—including Dr. Peter Fagan at Johns Hopkins Hospital—also avoided interviews for this piece. Which is curious, because it would seem that the case for transgender rights is an easy one to make.

Consider Christina Madrazo. A recent article in the *Village Voice* detailed the trials of this transsexual who was born a man in Mexico. He was beaten and tormented as a youngster for being a *maricón* ("faggot"); even Madrazo's family was cruel because the young boy acted and tried dressing like a girl. "Why do you want to wear those girlish clothes?" Madrazo's mother would shriek. "Why do you have to move like that?"

When puberty hit, Madrazo started taking female hormones and finding solace in the company of another transsexual in town. At fifteen, Madrazo left home and, unable to find steady work because of his/her appearance, took up a series of odd jobs to save $500 for breast implants. Eventually Madrazo joined a traveling transvestite show and then, in 1991, quietly sneaked across the border to El Paso and hopped a bus to Miami.

Even in Miami there was little work, and Madrazo was eventually arrested for soliciting. In despair, Madrazo went back to Mexico four years later, only to be beaten so severely in the street one night that his/her face was permanently scarred. In 1998, Madrazo came back to the States and tried to become legal. Instead, Madrazo was caught up in the INS bureaucracy and placed in detention. INS, unable to decide whether Madrazo belonged in the men's or women's wing, put him/her in solitary confinement. There Madrazo was raped, twice, by a male guard.

MADRAZO'S CASE seems exceptional, but not isolated. And it is, of course, easy to understand why transgender people would be such frequent victims of abuse. For one thing, unlike, say, homosexuals, many transgender people can't hide or pass unnoticed when in hostile company. Also, because they inhabit a strange cultural place between the sexes, they are often placed in situations where the culture must choose whether a person is male or female, and the mechanisms for handling transgender people are clumsy at best. Finally, although it's not polite to say so, many transgender people live their lives in an attempt to pass off a lie. It isn't right, but it is true that people don't like being lied to, and in many situations concerning sexual identity, violence quickly follows revelation.

It is impossible not to acknowledge the difficulty of the transgender life. The sheer lengths to which some of them go in order to change their bodies are staggering and—in the truest sense of the word—pitiable. Transsexuals who are born male often go through an agonizing process to reassign their sex. It begins with hormone therapy and then electrolysis. A tracheal shave helps raise the pitch of the voice. Breast implants are common, as are cheek implants and rhinoplasty. Often the transformation process is completed with radical surgeries—vaginoplasty and labiaplasty, where the penis and testicles are removed and a simulacrum of female genitalia is created. Transsexuals who are born women will frequently take high doses of testosterone, which lowers the voice, adds facial and body hair, and muscle bulk, particularly to the shoulders and arms. Some female-to-male transsexuals will undergo double mastectomies. In the end, some opt for the surgical creation of a penis while others spend vast sums of money in the search for a realistic prosthesis.

All of which suggests that at least for some transgenders, the compulsion to be the opposite sex is not merely a cry for attention or a political statement—these people endure too much. Whatever they feel must be real. Not to be sympathetic to their suffering, both internal and physical, would be inhuman.

That said, we shouldn't allow an evaluation of the transgender-rights argument to be ruled by sympathy. What, politically speaking, do transgenders

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

want? For starters, not to be assaulted by prison guards and barroom toughs, the way Christina Madrazo and Brandon Teena were. Also, they want not to be discriminated against when competing for jobs or housing. All of which are philosophical no-brainers: America would be a poorer place if it didn't provide these rights for transgenders.

But as you look further down the transgender grievance list, the demands become less and less compelling. Transgender advocacy groups want unfettered license to alter birth certificates, so that, for example, a transgender born male could become legally female. Correspondingly, they want the courts to recognize their marriages, and hence their interests in child custody cases and inheritance. In San Francisco, transgenders have already persuaded the city to provide sex-change benefits for city workers and separate jail space for prison inmates, two perks they would like to see expanded nationwide. And, in a small but telling detail, they want to dictate the way people use pronouns in reference to them. A Transgender Nation primer explains, "To refer to transgendered persons using pronouns and possessive adjectives appropriate to their birth sex (*i.e.*, 'he' or 'his' for male-to-female persons, 'she' or 'her' for female-to-male persons) is equivalent to calling a gay man 'faggot' or a lesbian 'dyke.' It is extremely offensive."

The heart of the transgender argument was on display recently in Kansas, where the state supreme court ruled that the marriage between a man and a transsexual woman wasn't valid. J'Noel Gardiner was born male in Wisconsin. In 1988, J'Noel, still living as a man, married a woman. Three years later, J'Noel began sexual transitioning. In February 1994, the court record states, "J'Noel had a bilateral orchiectomy to remove the testicles." Three months later he and his wife divorced. After sex-reassignment surgery, J'Noel had Wisconsin change the sex listed on his/her birth certificate.

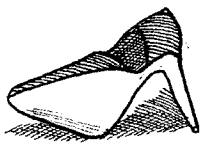
In May 1998, while working as a professor at Park College, J'Noel met Marshall Gardiner, one of the school's financial contributors. After their third or fourth date, Marshall proposed. The two were married in September. J'Noel was forty; Marshall was eighty-five. Marshall died a year later and his estranged son, Joe, filed suit in an attempt to prevent much of his father's estate from passing to J'Noel. The case made it to the Kansas Supreme Court, which eventually ruled that the marriage had never been valid.

In their judgement, the court cited the ruling in a similar Texas case which stated, "[T]hrough surgery and hormones, a transsexual male can be made to look like a woman, including female genitalia and breasts. Transsexual medical treatment, however, does not create the internal sexual organs of a woman, except for the vaginal canal. There is no womb, cervix, or ovaries in the post-operative transsexual female. . . . [T]he male chromosomes do not change with either hormonal treatment or sex reassignment surgery. Biologically, a post-operative female transsexual is still a male."

The Texas court concluded, "There are some things we cannot will into being. They just are." And they're right. All of the hormones, and all of the surgery is just cosmetic. It's an extended version of crossdressing, and it doesn't change matters at the molecular level.

Which uncovers the Orwellian center of the transgender debate. More than acceptance, more than justice, more than anything else, transgenders want to control an official, plastic version of the truth. They want to believe a reality that doesn't exist, which is acceptable. But they want to compel others to believe, which isn't.

There are thousands, if not millions, of men in America who, deep down, know that they are major league shortstops. No, they can't throw a ball from short to first like a rocket. And no, they can't hit a ninety-five-mile-an-hour fastball. But in their heart-of-hearts, they're ballplayers. If they were to march on Yankee Stadium and demand spots on the roster, all of America would laugh at them.



In San Francisco, transgenders have already persuaded the city to provide sex-change benefits for city workers and separate jail space for prison inmates.

In a news story in the early nineties, male-to-female transsexual Veronica Klaus complained, "I get tired of having to prove who I am. It's a matter of people respecting people to see them as they want to be seen."

Which is perhaps the saddest thing about the transgender life. We all want to be seen a certain way. None of us should be given the power to force others to do it. ◆

Jonathan V. Last is online editor of The Weekly Standard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When Harry Became Sally

Charlotte Allen gets *really* confused when she goes to a symposium on the legal requirements of the transgender community.

Georgetown University's law school decided to devote its annual symposium on gender and sexuality this year to the legal problems of transsexuals. No, wait, the word "transsexual" is out of fashion these days with the political correctness police. Make that the legal problems of "transgender people."

And yes, it was *that* Georgetown University, the Catholic school in Washington, D.C., the one with the brouhaha a couple of years ago over whether crucifixes on the wall are oppressive. Georgetown's law school sponsors the *Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law,* which in turn sponsors the symposia. This year's was titled "Crossing Boundaries, Redefining Gender: A New Front on Equality." Oh well, I thought as I settled into a seat in Georgetown's moot courtroom to listen to the keynote speech, at least I'll see some glam drag queens. You know, Holly Woodlawn types: stiletto heels, mascara to die for. Instead, I got Phyllis Frye.

Phyllis Frye had once been a male civil engineer in Houston, Texas, but now she is a female lawyer in a power suit and no-nonsense gray hair, except with a flat chest, a beer belly, and keg-shaped calves stuck into sensible lace-up brogues. This was low-church transgender, where you don't bother with the fancy 'dos and the silicone. Call it the Mrs. Doubtfire look. Frye was onstage talking about the unfairness of parents' assigning their children at birth to the male sex or the female sex solely on the basis of their "clothed genitals that no one can see."

Frye had been the lead attorney in a

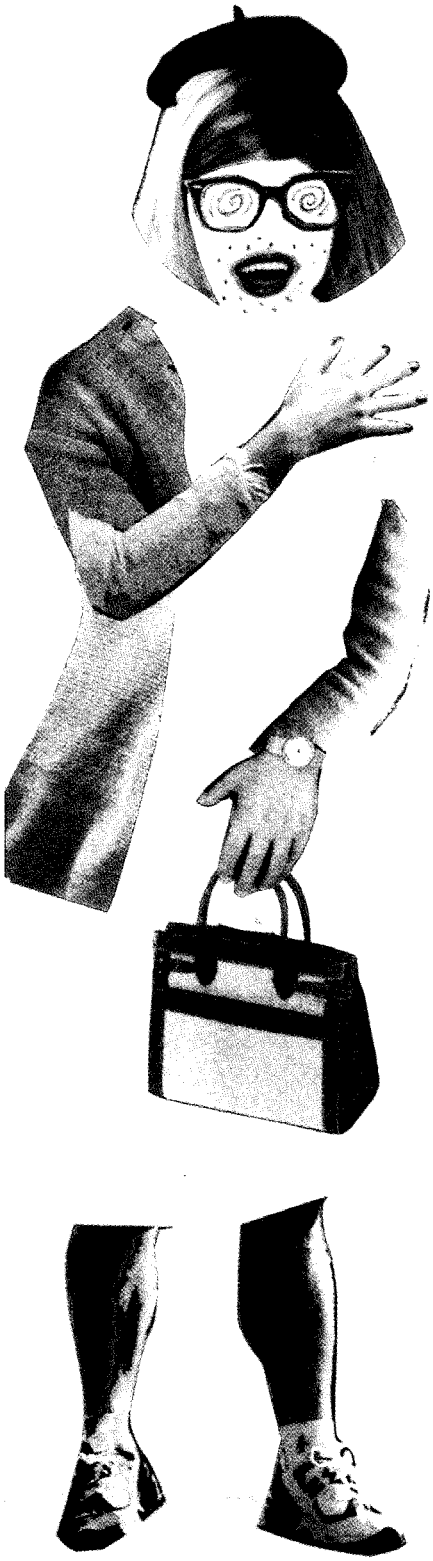
Collages by Sandy McClelland

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recent case in Texas involving one Christie Littleton, whose parents had made that very mistake in 1952, deeming their baby girl to be a baby boy and giving her the name Lee. As soon as she grew up, Christie changed her name and her birth certificate and had a sex-change operation—except that we don't call them "sex-change operations" anymore, Frye explained: "That was the medical thinking of thirty years ago." The proper phrase nowadays is "corrective genital surgery."

CHRISTIE EVENTUALLY married a man named Jonathan, who died an untimely death in 1996—but a Texas appeals court ruled in 1999 that she could not bring a medical malpractice suit as his surviving spouse against his physician because, surgery or no surgery, Christie's chromosomes made her a man, and under Texas law, which recognizes as valid only marriages between a man and a woman, she was not a surviving spouse. In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court turned down Christie's request to set aside the ruling. That was the end of her legal case, although not of her story, which can be perused on-line, along with several photographs of Christie in her wedding dress, at *christielee.net*. "Intersex people need to come out, step out, and not fight what they are," said Frye.

After Frye finished her speech, a lawyer friend of hers named Alyson joined her on the stage. Alyson was a middle-aged blonde with wire-rimmed glasses and an exceedingly receding hairline, from which her locks flowed down her back. "If there are a hundred people in this room, there's one intersex person and one female with a Y-chromosome," said Alyson. I looked around at my fellow audience members, but most, clearly Georgetown law students, looked as though they had



clothed genitals of the sex their parents had assigned them, although there were a few members of the Sisterhood of the High Scalp present. Eventually, a tall broad-shouldered woman in the back stood up and identified herself as probably that Y-chromosome female. "Humanity doesn't come in two mutually exclusive genders," she said.

Earline Budd, identified in the program as "an openly transgender woman living with HIV/AIDS" and a motivational speaker and transgender health empowerment manager for Us Helping Us, People Into Living, Inc., in Washington, also spoke up. "I'm totally about the African-American transgender community," said Budd, an imposing figure with multiple braids and curling purple fingernails. Budd opined that poor black transgender people with drug problems didn't have the same concerns about how to get married as fancy white lawyers like Phyllis and Alyson. "I ask what can be done for the intergender community right here," she said.

There was more talk about the "trans community" (another name for it) as well as "MTFs" (male-to-female transgender people), "FTMs" (female-to-male transgender people), and "transitioning transgenders" (those are people who wear the clothes but haven't gotten around to the surgery). Then Phyllis Frye introduced her wife, who, unlike Christie Littleton's spouse, turned out to be a biological female left over from Phyllis' days as a male. "We're both heterosexuals," Phyllis announced proudly. "Same-sex marriage has been around for a long time."

There was a break, and I wandered around the hallway outside the moot courtroom, wondering whether I could pass for a transgender person, as I'm 5'10" (MTF) and was wearing slacks (FTM). I looked at back issues of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law on a display table. The articles had titles like: "Breaking the Line Between Biology and Parental Rights in Planned Lesbian Families: When Semen Donors Are Not Fathers" and "Children's Interests and Information Disclosure: Who Provided the Egg and Sperm? Or Mommy, Where (and Whom) Do I Come From?" A flyer invited me, had I been a law student, to enter a $1,000 competition sponsored by the National Lesbian and Gay Law Association for best essay on a "cutting edge legal issue affecting the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender community." If I won, my article would be published in Tulane University's journal of *Law & Sexuality* (I guess every law school must have one of these journals), and I would get free registration, airfare, and lodging for Lavender Law 2002 in Philadelphia. It was a genuine case of: first prize, a week in Philadelphia.

AFTER THE BREAK, the gender-bending got serious. Shannon Minter, a short, bearded fellow with tiny hands poking like rabbit paws out of his suit sleeves, led a panel discussion about a lawsuit he had worked on that also involved marriage and corrective surgery: the live-televised (on Court TV) child-custody case of Michael and Linda Kantaras of Clearwater, Florida. Michael had once been Margo Kantaras, but during the 1980s, he had his breasts, uterus, and ovaries removed, and he started taking the male hormones that gave him the mustache he sported in the courtroom. Michael and Linda married in 1989, and he adopted her two children, a boy now thirteen, born before the marriage, and a girl now ten conceived by artificial insemination thereafter (by the way, the politically correct word for that nowadays is "alternate insemination"). When Michael ran off with Linda's best friend in 1998, she denied him access to the kids, and the still-ongoing custody suit followed, one of whose major issues is whether Michael actually qualifies as a man (and therefore a father, or even an ex-husband), since his surgery did not include the usual final step of constructing a penis. Among many other things, Linda Kantaras testified that she and Michael had never had sex. "The core issue from a medical perspective is what is a person's sexual identity, and that's self-defined," insisted Minter.

Phyllis Frye was talking about the unfairness of parents' assigning their children's sex at birth on the basis of their "clothed genitals."

He turned for a comment from the gray-haired, clean-shaven guy in a crewneck sweater sitting next to him at the table—no, wait, that wasn't a guy, that was Jennifer, a lesbian. Jennifer Levi, senior staff attorney at Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders. It was confusing: Levi was trying to free herself from a sexual stereotype by dressing like a man, while Minter was trying to fit a sexual stereotype by dressing like a man. What did lesbians and transgender people have in common in the first place, since each group wanted to be and do what the other group adamantly rejected? Jennifer discussed the plight of one of her clients, a boy, or rather, a girl, expelled from middle school apparently for wearing a dress. Levi shook her head sadly: "The school district didn't understand. It perceived this child as gay."

The knottiest legal problem for transgender people, it emerged, is how to qualify for boodle and special treatment under the Americans with Disabilities Act and still maintain the position that being transgender isn't a disability. "It's kind of tough," admitted one of the lawyers on the panel. "There's nothing wrong with you, but still, it's a medical problem. Maybe the best way to look at it is that transgender people are prevented from engaging in major life activities, such as a teenager interacting with others."

ANOTHER BIG PROBLEM (besides restroom access, which judges have so far laughed out of court) is how to get an amended birth certificate and driver's license once you've had "sexual reassignment surgery," another politically correct name for what used to be known as a sex change. It seems that some, although not all, states balk at such rewriting of official documents. Virginia, for example, simply crosses out the "M" and writes in an "F," which doesn't look very good. "You can always go to Amsterdam and get a new birth certificate," suggested one lawyer helpfully. Ah, Amsterdam, where anything goes.

Question time: "What is the state's interest in gendering people anyway?" asked an audience member. "Why do they assign people a sex at birth in the first place?"

Well, let's see or maybe let's not see. My own self-defined sexual identity (or maybe it was the gender my parents had assigned me at birth) was urging a trip to the ladies' room. After that, I decided to skip a wine-and-cheese reception and head out. My head was aching from all the hormones and the chromosomes and the crisscrossing of gonadal reassignments—and I'd missed out on the hoped-for glam drag queens.◆

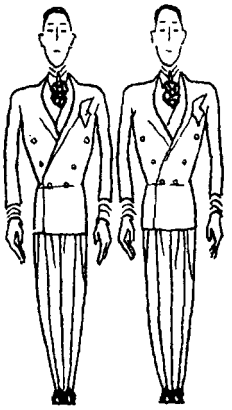
Charlotte Allen is author of The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus *(Free Press).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Token Man

Heather Has Two Readers

John Zardi checks out the "alternative families" section at Politics & Prose.



THE MOST EXCRUCIATINGLY correct bookstore in the capital of this diversity-sensitive country is Politics & Prose on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, D.C. There are, of course, black, lesbian-gay-transsexual, and ethnic bookstores elsewhere in the city. Politics & Prose, though, is the most convenient to the Cleveland Park neighborhood, the company town of rich liberalism. At the close of each day, the locals in their cappuccino-stained work clothes tramp up the street from the foundation grant mines to pick up the quota assigned by the *Washington Post Book World.*

I'd never been looked on by the clerks as anything other than an intruder from outside the valley. Until, that is, on an impulse, I asked what books they had on "alternative families." While I'm not a differently abled lesbian of color adoptive parent, in my own small way I qualify, as the father of a child not born in wedlock.

It's not much, I know, but it was enough to evoke an immediate and sympathetic response from the staff. At least I wasn't Ozzie in the *Ozzie & Harriet* model. You know, with married male and female parents living together with their children. Politics & Prose does have an alternative families section and had on offer the two classics, *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*, along with an innovative royal love story for children, *King & King*, and a selection of other books showing the diversity of family structures.

The Politics & Prose staff apologized for not having more alternative family books. It seemed that there weren't that many new books coming out, and the ones that do don't stay in print.

I wondered why and started calling on other bookstores in Washington, New York, California, Nevada, Oregon, and Florida—much of the blue colored part of the country. Everywhere, it seemed, for all the efforts of diversity counselors over the past decade, there aren't many *Heather*-type books on sale because nobody wants to pay their own money to buy them.

And yet there they are. *Heather* celebrated her tenth anniversary two years back (I have a commemorative copy). So if it's not being bought in bookstores, then who's buying it?

You are. That would be you, Ms. Taxpayer. According to their publishers and distributors, "alternative family" books are mostly bought by libraries and school boards, not by people spending their own money. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, author and co-director of The National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, says, "Buying these books is an inexpensive way of demonstrating compliance with diversity."

What about all the gay parents out there? "Oh, come on now," a gay publisher told me. "Gay parents are like other parents. They buy *Goodnight Moon* and every other book every straight parent buys. They're not going to actually read *Heather Has Two Mommies* to their kids. It's not a good book for a child."

That makes sense. For all the recent fuss over gay adoptive parents in Florida, and Rosie O' Donnell coming out of the closet as a gay parent, there are only a teensy weensy number of actual "culturally gay" parents out there. There have always been gay parents, and there will always be gay parents, but along with their straight counterparts they're going to buy *Misty of Chincoteague* and tell their kids, "I don't care who started the fight, both of you just stop it." For her part, Barbara Whitehead, who's long been a conservative family advocate, says, "I've noticed gay parents have the same interests as straight parents." So have I, by the way.

Are the publishers making any money off these books? Not enough to pay for a trade show booth. The two biggest sellers, *Heather* and *Daddy's Roommate* sell perhaps 2,000 and 1,000 copies a year, respectively, even with the support provided by librarians and school boards. The gay publishers have plenty of business selling adult literature and have downsized their children's literature offerings.

So what's the point of the "alternative families" children's literature? It would seem that it's a way of providing stage props for the diversity consulting business. A single corporate diversity manager costs more than the purchase of three or four years' sales of *Heather*. And that one diversity manager in turn can be held up for students as a career role model by several women's studies professors. This whole teetering structure is being supported by almost no final demand.

That's what Wall Street would call a classic speculative bubble. Maybe it's going to pop soon. ◆

John Zardi is a New York writer who hails from Washington's chic Cleveland Park.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Interview

A Tale of Two Schools

When Karen Stabiner's All Girls: Single-Sex Education and Why It Matters *hits the bookstores soon, expect a lively debate on the subject. A feminist, Stabiner makes the case for single-sex education—a position not usually embraced by feminists—by presenting a compelling, novelistic account of a year in the life of two very different all-girls schools, Marlborough, an elite prep school in Los Angeles, and The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem, or TYWLS (pronounced twills).*

Some readers will disagree with Stabiner on the theories supporting single-sex education. She cites Mary Pipher of Reviving Ophelia *fame, Harvard's Carol Gilligan, and scholar David Sadker to the effect that girls are shortchanged by schools in favor of boys. But a lot of research shows that the opposite is true—how can girls be failing when the majority of student leaders are girls and girls go to college at higher rates than boys?*

Whatever you think about this issue, this book is a must read for anyone who cares about the fate not only of single-sex education but of education in general. In Stabiner's hands, the material becomes a rip-roaring adventure-tale in which, after many trials, at the end of the day, is an envelope, a thick one indicating that a girl has been accepted by a college, or a thin one with disappointing news. Expect to be on the edge of your seat as you worry about the fate of the girls. Needless to say, all the girls at Marlborough go to college, but—and I hope I'm not spoiling the ending—so, too, did the girls at TYWLS, except for one who opted for the military.

Stabiner talked by telephone from her residence in Santa Monica to TWQ *editor Charlotte Hays.*

Author Karen Stabiner

TWQ: *My favorite girl in the book was Diana, who attended TYWLS and who joked that she'd never been farther west than Harlem. She said that if wearing a uniform and exhausting herself with school work was the only way to get somewhere, that was what she was willing to do. How did single-sex education help this girl?*

STABINER: People who are skeptical of single-sex education would say that the Harlem school did nothing for Diana that was any different from what any good, progressive public school with small classes and passionate teachers would have done. That is the foundation of much of the skepticism about all-girls schools: We can't isolate the benefits of separating boys and girls, so we shouldn't do it. But I think that, from the TYWLS principal on down, people responded to Diana and her very real and threatening problems in a way that was a function of being an all-girls school. They saw the problems coming, and they responded in an incredibly supportive and collaborative way.

She had some emotional problems because of things that were going on in her family, and at one point, the principal and the counselor pulled in an outside psychologist. The parents and one of the receptionists who had been at the school since the beginning banded together to make sure that this girl didn't fall through the cracks. It all had to do with nurturing and support and encouragement. And it might not have happened in a coed school; it might not have happened without a real sensitivity to teenage girls' behavior. In Diana's case, the advantages of an all-girls school were dramatic. There was much holding of breath while I wrote the epilogue; people who had read the manuscript wanted to know what had happened to her. I was so worried about her.

Photo by Patricia Williams

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TWQ: *Is single-sex education even more beneficial for kids like Diana than it is for girls from affluent families?*

STABINER: A study by Cornelius Riordan at Providence College says that girls, minorities, and the poor stand to gain the most from a single-sex environment. My daughter goes to Marlborough, and if it were somehow swallowed up in a black hole tomorrow, and if there were no other all-girls school in Los Angeles, she and her friends would survive. They would face issues that I would prefer she not have to deal with, both social and educational, but they would have options. If you've led a life of relative privilege, you've always gone to good schools, and you have a tradition of education in your family, then the value of an all-girls school is not going to be quite so dramatic.

But when you come from a background where nobody in your family graduated from high school, possibly your parents don't speak English, and you're doing childcare three afternoons a week, then it can be more difficult to excel at school. If you're at a school with overcrowded classes, overextended teachers, and limited resources, it's going to be even harder to do well. That's where a school like TYWLS can make a profound difference. It says: Come here, and start to build a new future for yourself.

TWQ: *What's overall the best thing about an all-girls education?*

STABINER: I'll have to quote the girls themselves on that one. They say, "What's the best thing about an all-girls school?" "No boys." "The worst thing?" "No boys." As a mom, I'd say the best thing is that it gives these girls time to be girls. Among my friends, there's a yearning to give our daughters more time. Life is moving way too fast for pre-teens, and the single-sex environment makes it easier for them not to be in a hurry. They don't have to act sophisticated. They don't have to be "on" all the time. They learn how to be their best selves, whatever they may be. They graduate knowing who they are and what they want. This environment opens doors for girls and keeps them open as they enter the world. The valedictorian at TYWLS this year is a perfect example: Maryam walked in the door in seventh grade, announced her intention to get straight A's all the way through, and will go to Columbia University in the fall, on full financial aid. First she took care of herself; now she has time for a social life.

And the girls at Marlborough, who were seniors when I wrote *All Girls*, have found that their concerns about getting a late start were groundless. As soon as they got to college, and there were boys in the classroom, they found themselves dating. And they come to these relationships with a strong sense of themselves.

TWQ: *One of the things that struck me reading this book is that the kids who succeeded had parents who were deeply involved with their education and had high ambitions for their children.*

STABINER: Oh, absolutely. One thing that became very clear during the writing of this book is how important the role of the parent is. I came out of it visualizing the educational process as a triangle, with the school and the family at the base and the child at the top. At too many schools, parents just drop off their kids and expect them to come out educated. Schools like Marlborough and TYWLS expect parents to be involved, and they build opportunities for involvement into the program. At TYWLS, parents are required to sign a pledge in which they agree to attend two parent-teacher conferences during the year. Each fall, individual families meet with the principal to set goals for each girl, and then they follow up in the spring. I think you probably could do it without engaged parents, but it would be harder.

If parents provide an environment at home that's conducive to studying, it's an enormous help. Diana, for example, was let off of her usual nightly chores when she was in ninth grade so that she could get used to the rigors of high school. Maryam, the TYWLS valedictorian, had a computer in her room, because her mother wanted to be sure that she had everything she needed to do well. Marlborough senior Sommer Louie lived in a household committed to excellence in education. The family's dining room became the "college room," the table loaded with banker's boxes full of college files, catalogues, and directories; a stack of how-to books in the corner. It was the cottage industry in that house.

Parents can really make the difference between a child's education being a wonderful and dynamic experience and a struggle. Students need help on both sides. A girl can't do it without a decent classroom experience, and she can't do it as easily without parental support.

TWQ: *What are the advantages the Marlborough experience provided?*

STABINER: I remember coming home a couple of weeks after I started going to Marlborough and saying to my husband, "I don't know about these Marlborough seniors. They strike me as a little bit arrogant, and, as a writer, I don't quite know how I'm going to make people want to read about them." I was wrong. A few weeks later, I said, "I made a mistake. They're not arrogant. They are supremely comfortable with themselves, which is a marvelous thing."

They don't use the deferential beha-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

viors that we all learned in coed schools to get boys to pay attention. There's no yielding the floor; if they've got something to say; they will say it. There's none of the almost subconscious flirtatious and accommodating behavior that girls often fall into. They don't need to use it; it holds no currency at school. What Marlborough turns out, in the main, are hardworking, energetic girls who are at ease with themselves, girls who are free to stumble and willing to take risks.

TWQ: *You've just described a Marlborough girl. Describe a TYWLS girl.*

STABINER: The TYWLS girls are just as determined, sometimes more so, because they know how much is at stake. You could see it when they walked to school in the morning, in their uniforms. They walked down the street with such pride; that uniform was a badge of honor. I think they feel special, and lucky to have such a remarkable opportunity. There are always exceptions—girls at Marlborough who find it too rigorous, girls at TYWLS who feel overwhelmed rather than challenged. But the great majority of girls believe that they are getting a better education than they would anywhere else, and they don't intend to waste it.

TWQ: *Why do you think there's been so much opposition to single-sex education?*

STABINER: This may be where you and I part company politically. I am of the generation that still considers being called a feminist a compliment. It pains me greatly to hear it used as a pejorative. I firmly believe that if it were not for Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and everybody who said, "Wait a minute, we would like to march into the future next to you, not behind you," you and I might well not be having this conversation. Those women, who wanted a new role for women, defined equality in ways that we could all understand. Is this school spending as much on girls' athletics as it is on boys' athletics? Are there as many girls in this math class as there are boys? Can we find quantifiable evidence that women are getting the same opportunities as men?

What we've seen since, as the educational researchers turn in their research, and I'm thinking particularly of David Sadker, who, with his late wife, wrote the bible of all this, *Failing at Fairness*, about how American schools shortchanged girls. What we found was that girls may be able to get in the door, but once inside, girls are still not being treated the same way boys are. Educators have tried to fix the coed classroom. In fact, the head of school at Marlborough told me a story about her own classroom, when she worked at a coed school. She had taken gender sensitivity training sessions, and really thought she had it nailed and yet, when a researcher came in to videotape her class, she found that she was acknowledging boys over girls at a ratio of five to one.

TWQ: *Well, a number of studies indicate it's just the opposite. Boys are the ones who get shortchanged; the education system has been feminized. Those of us who think this way would say that, if boys are called on more, it's to keep them interested—girls are already interested—or because boys are rambunctious and calling on them is a way to keep their attention.*

STABINER: And every time a teacher calls on a boy just to keep him interested, it's at the cost of that already-interested girl. Why should she be penalized for being engaged? I came across one interesting bit of behavioral research: Boys tend to raise their hands while they're thinking. Girls tend to raise their hands after they have the answer. There are solutions to this inequity that do not involve calling on the boys first and, in fact, girls' schools often use innovative teaching tactics to even out the differences among girls. One Marlborough teacher handed out "talking coins" at the start of class, which were to be spent by the end. A quiet girl had to find ways to participate in the conversation, while a talkative girl had to pace herself or run out of chances. If we're talking about boys and girls—and most children do go to coed schools—then let's talk about ways to equalize the experience.

But to get back to your question: Why is there opposition to single-sex education? Establishing single-sex public schools requires acknowledging that boys and girls are, in fact, not the same, and there is a justifiable fear that girls will pay for that acknowledgment. If single-sex schools take us back to the days of auto shop and home ec with a different set of skills for boys and girls, then we've done our children no favor. But if we can create schools that address different learning styles and still provide equal opportunities, then we have a chance for dynamic improvement, for both boys and girls.

TWQ: *We part company on a number of issues, but we both recognize the value of single-sex education. Is there an overall message in your book?*

STABINER: A central theme of *All Girls* is that single-sex schools are at the vanguard of what's going on in education today. They are reinventing the classroom and, in many ways, leading a reform movement. We ought to look at what they have to offer and borrow their techniques for use in coeducational schools. The girls I wrote about are thriving, and they're doing it in an environment that takes them seriously and helps them grow. They are learning to be their best selves, competent and comfortable with who they are. Isn't that what all children deserve? ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Odd Couple

Single-sex education advocate ***Leonard Sax*** wonders why the Bush administration is getting all the blame (and credit) for something Kay Bailey Hutchison and Hillary Clinton teamed up to do for the nation's public schools.

SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION has long been a no-no for feminists. So it was not surprising that, when the Department of Education announced this spring that girls' schools and boys' schools would henceforth be eligible for public money, the reaction was a barrage of protest. "The Bush administration's proposal for single-sex schools is a giant step backward in the struggle for girls' and women's equality," Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women, proclaimed in *USA Today*. Terry O'Neill, the organization's spokesman, chimed in: "How can a single-sex school teach boys to be led by girls?" she asked.

For Nancy Zirkin, director of public policy for the American Association of University Women, the new rules on single-sex education raised the specter of racial segregation. Zirkin invoked the language of *Brown v. Board of Education* when she declared, "We believe that separate is never equal." "It is ironic and discouraging that the Bush administration has chosen to use its regulatory power to encourage sex discrimination by promoting single-sex education," wrote Leslie Wolfe, president of the Center for Women Policy Studies, in a letter to the *New York Times*.

Hold on, ladies. You're attacking the wrong folks. The real "culprits" are two female senators—Republican stalwart Kay Bailey Hutchison and Hillary Clinton, the feminist icon. When Hutchison proposed an amendment to the 2001 education bill to permit single-sex education in public schools, Clinton courageously rose to voice support.

Single-sex education in public schools has been illegal (more or less) since the passage of Title IX in 1972.

Hutchison first introduced the amendment in 1998, when it passed in the Senate but then met its doom in the form of a veto from Senator Clinton's husband. During the debate that year, Senator Ted Kennedy argued that the amendment raised a "sinister and real issue of constitutionality." For good measure, Kennedy added that it would "undermine the whole movement of trying to get equal treatment for women."

When Hutchison tried again, in June 2001, something amazing happened—the amendment passed the Senate by unanimous consent and subsequently was signed into law. This might not have happened but for the support of Clinton, who signed on as a co-sponsor. With Clinton on board, not a single senator spoke against the amendment. Single-sex education in public schools has been illegal (more or less) since the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. The Hutchison amendment made public single-sex education unambiguously legal and eligible for up to $450 million a year in federal funding.

When guidelines regarding this amendment were promulgated in May, newspapers—like the feminist establishment—simply assumed that the Bush administration was behind the

Photos by Pierce Atkins; National Cathedral School for Girls

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

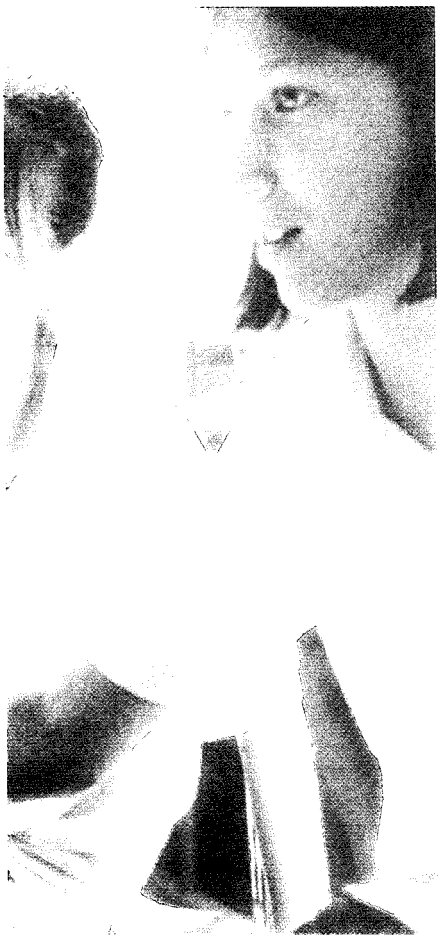
shift in policy: "Bush Plan Would Reverse Key Policy," shouted the *Washington Post*'s front page headline. The *New York Times*' headline blared: "White House Proposes New View of Education Law to Encourage Single-Sex Schools."

The new rules fly in the face of the "findings" of a famous report by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), which now opposes single-sex education. In 1998, the organization published *Separated by Sex*, a report on single-sex education for girls. The press release was headlined: "Report Finds Separating by Sex Not the Solution to Gender Inequity in School." The release listed five findings, all of which were negative. It further noted that single-sex public schools are of "questionable legality."

People who went on to read the report itself, however, were in for a surprise. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial noted the disparity between the report and the accompanying press release. "The Association tanked its own study," the *Journal* concluded. The introductory essay was by Pamela Haag, director of research for the AAUW's Education Foundation, who wrote that "published studies that use subject preferences and girls' attitudes toward math and science as indicators have concluded uniformly that single-sex environments have a positive effect for girls." Cornelius Riordan, professor of sociology at Providence College and an authority on single-sex education, was emphatic: "Single-sex schools work. They work for girls and boys, women and men, whites and non-whites." "The [beneficial] effects of single-sex schools are greatest among black or Hispanic females from low socioeconomic homes," he emphasized.

Shortly after the Young Women's Leadership School, a girls-only public school in East Harlem, opened its doors in the fall of 1996, the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women, joined by the ACLU, filed a formal complaint with the Department of Education which claimed that the school violated Title IX. Like Zirkin more recently, Anne Connors, president of New York NOW, invoked the language of *Brown v. Board of Education*, insisting that the school should be closed: "Separate but equal is not OK," she said.

The Young Women's Leadership School has been phenomenally successful. In the most recent class, 100 percent of the girls passed the New York Regents exam in English, compared with 42 percent citywide.



The Young Women's Leadership School has been phenomenally successful. In the most recent class, 100 percent of the girls passed the New York Regents exam in English, compared with 42 percent citywide. The school has the best attendance record in its district. All but one member of the class of 2001 went on to attend a four-year college; the one exception is a woman who enlisted in the Navy. Every member of the class of 2002 has been accepted to a four-year college. These figures are even more impressive when you consider that 90 percent of the graduating seniors came from families where neither parent attended college.

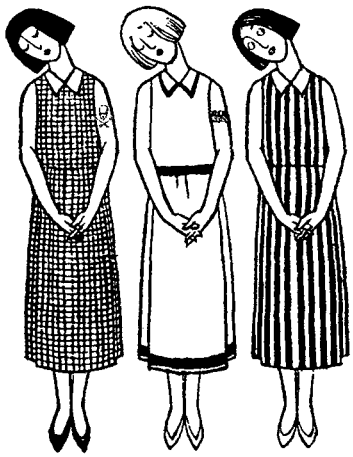
THE SUCCESS of the Young Women's Leadership School appears to have been an important factor in Hillary Clinton's decision to support the single-sex education amendment. On the floor of the Senate, Clinton pronounced the East Harlem school "one of the premier public schools for girls in our nation," adding, "We could use more schools such as this."

Why should the AAUW and the feminist establishment oppose single-sex education? And why does Clinton support it? The answer to both questions has to do with school vouchers and school choice. Over the past ten years, the weight of evidence demonstrating the benefits of single-sex education has become overwhelming. Studies from the United States and from around the world have found that both girls and boys who attend single-sex schools do better in school, have a better attitude toward school, and may be less likely to get involved in drugs and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KARLYN BOWMAN'S

Poll-Pourri



Needlepoint News

How popular are tattoos? In 1999, 22 percent of those surveyed told interviewers from NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* that someone in their household had a tattoo. In an August 2000 survey, by Harris Interactive for American Demographics in 2001, 10 percent said they personally have or have had a tattoo and 2 percent a body piercing (other than an earring). Sixteen percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year olds have both. Young women were slightly more likely than young men to have body art. Fortunately, none of the respondents in the sixty-five and older group indulged in body piercing, though 5 percent did sport a tattoo.

Overall, teens regard tattoos on adults as a turn-off. A Gallup Youth Survey in 1997 found that only 19 percent of teens thought that tattoos made adults look more attractive, while 77 percent said they made them look less so. Also unappealing to teens: adults who chew tobacco (98 percent said it made them look less attractive), smoke cigars (92 percent) or cigarettes (89 percent), wear black leather and chains (87 percent), drink beer (84 percent), and shave their heads (82 percent). Thirty-nine percent said motorcycles made adults more attractive; 54 percent said it made them less so.

Young Fogeys

Tattoos and body piercing aside, polls suggest that most teens are a pretty traditional lot these days. An April 2000 survey conducted by the Global Strategy Group for the White House Conference found that 91 percent of twelve- to fifteen-year-olds shared the same basic values as their parents. More impressive than that finding is a recently released Gallup review of a quarter century of its surveys of teens. Teens tell Gallup that courtesy is important to them. They don't condone profanity. They say divorce should be harder to get.

The proportion of teens of high school age in these Gallup Youth Surveys who "smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, and experiment with marijuana" has declined dramatically over the course of these surveys. Nearly a quarter of teens in a 1979 Gallup Youth Survey said they had smoked in the past week. In 2001, only 12 percent gave that response. Thirty-eight percent said they had drunk alcoholic beverages in1979; in 2001, 21 percent gave that response. Forty-one percent in 1979 had tried marijuana. In the latest survey, that number has been cut by half, to 20 percent. ●

Karlyn Bowman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

alcohol. (You can review many of these studies at *SingleSexSchools.org.*) All those studies pose a problem for those who stubbornly oppose school vouchers. If single-sex education is so effective, why should it be available only to those kids whose parents can afford private school tuition? Shouldn't kids from poor families have the chance to benefit as well? Acknowledging the benefits of single-sex education would —in the eyes of the AAUW and like-minded organizations—inevitably fuel the school voucher movement.

Hence the strategy followed by most of the leadership of the "women's movement." Deny the benefits of single-sex education. Insist that the evidence is ambiguous—even though it isn't. That's a risky gambit in the age of the Internet, when any parent can go online and find two dozen or more scholarly reports demonstrating the unique advantages of single-sex classrooms for both girls and boys.

When it comes to vouchers, Clinton agrees with the AAUW and the National Organization for Women: She doesn't like them. But Clinton is smarter than NOW and the AAUW. "Public school choice should be expanded as broadly as possible," Clinton insisted. "There should not be any obstacle to providing single-sex choice within the public school system." That is Hillary's key insight. If single-sex schools offer unique advantages, why not encourage the development of single-sex schools inside the public school system? Why should the advantages be only for the rich? ◆

A physician and psychologist, Leonard Sax is executive director of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mean Like Me

A feminist author discovers that women aren't always nice. *Betsy Hart* says this isn't news to anyone who survived seventh grade.

My mother had a wonderful way of summing up small truths with bang-on accuracy. It was she, the mother of three boys and two girls, who noted simply that "boys are boys, and girls are manipulators."

That girls and women can be petty, mean, backstabbing, vindictive, and jealous is not news to any female who has survived the seventh grade. But it seems to be big news in the popular culture (really, don't baby boomers discover everything?) where the subject of "Mean Girls" has recently been the focus of lengthy articles in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the stuff of tabloid talk shows.

Into this climate enters *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman* by Phyllis Chesler, author of the best-selling *Women and Madness*, along with *Letters to a Young Feminist*, and a leader of the so-called "second wave" of feminism.

It comes down to this, a disillusioned Chesler seems to lament: In spite of all the wonderful, generous goodness which "should" inherently be found in the Sisterhood—as opposed to the brutish "brotherhood of man"—the fact is women can be real bitches.

Chesler worked on the book for decades. It shows. The too-long tome is full of angst-ridden anecdotes, stories, and all kinds of case histories of the little-defined group that Chesler interviewed for the book, women generally bemoaning how other women have betrayed them.

Chesler herself says she's been the victim of such treachery many times. She describes students who have been ungrateful, feminist compatriots who've stolen her ideas, and most of all her mother. Talk about too much information. Ouch. (Chesler's view seems to be that all mother/daughter and biological sister relationships are doomed from the start.) One can't help feeling that the book may have been written to settle more than a few old scores.

Chesler looks at everything from ancient mythology to today's middle school, from the animal kingdom to the modern workplace, and finds that women tend to resemble Cinderella's stepsisters a lot more than they do Cinderella.

One woman named Elsa recounts, "My best friend was a divorced woman who could not have children. I refused to discriminate against her because she was a divorced woman. In retrospect, I should have shunned her the way the other married women did. My friend not only made off with my husband. What was worse was her systematic campaign to become my son's mother."

Another woman has a similar tale.

Drawing by Yuri Kolyadenko

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I became friendly with a woman in our new neighborhood . . . . I confided in her and considered her a best friend. Guess what? About a year into our friendship she had begun having an affair with my husband."

FORTUNATELY FOR US, women's betrayal isn't always so complete. Still, Chesler writes that even young girls "learn that a safe way to attack someone else is behind her back, so that she will not know who is responsible. This tracks girls and women into lives of chronic gossip and rumor mongering. . . . Girls may use social manipulation to dominate or express anger because they have learned to do this from their female role models: adult women."

And watch out for those adult women. If they aren't stealing husbands, they're stealing the top spots in the business world. Unless there is a lot of room for women in key positions, says Chesler, the knives will be out.

(For Chesler, the biggest outrage seems to be women who don't believe another woman's story of sexual harassment or discrimination on the job, though it should hardly be a news flash that such accusations shouldn't be believed unless and until they are proven.)

Throughout the book, Chesler maintains an air of sad incredulity that women can be, in their own duplicitous, manipulative way, really nasty—just like men. Remember *Lord of the Flies*?

Sigh. Weren't we supposed to be so much better than "them"?

But of course we aren't "better." Women are different from men, and different from each other. We're also fully human, which makes us just as capable of sin in all its amazing manifestations as our brutish brothers.

Chesler appears conflicted about this truth, to which she grudgingly pays lip service, while looking for other "reasons" for women's inhumanity to women. Maybe it's that we live under an oppressive male culture, so we've learned to oppress others. Maybe it's that there are only a few "top" spots for women, whether in the workplace or in a culture that values youth and beauty too much, so we're always looking to knock off or knock down the competition. But maybe it really is just that women are real people after all.

Where Chesler's work proves valuable is that first, this is a well-known feminist pointing out the very inconvenient truth that the Sisterhood can be pretty bloody. Further, interspersed between the scenes of tortured betrayal and anecdotes that seemed mined from group therapy sessions centered around singing, sharing, and emotionalism, Chesler includes some really interesting data about how women typically relate to each other.

And a lot of it isn't pretty. For instance, "According to University of California anthropologist Victoria Burbank," writes Chesler, "women mainly target other women for aggression. They did so in 91 percent of the 137 societies Burbank surveyed. . . ." In other words, the message to husband-stealers is this: It's generally the other woman, not the husband, who will bear the brunt of the scorned wife's wrath.

Along the way, Chesler notes that too many women, including perhaps herself, are wholly focused on how others have vivisected them, rarely on how they have been cruel to other women. Chesler offers her prescription for how women can overcome such backbiting, manipulative habits. Some of it makes great sense. "A woman must be encouraged to put what she wants into words, to ask for it directly, not to wait for someone to guess what she wants. If a woman cannot get what she wants, she does not have to pout, blame herself, give up, disconnect, or become enraged. She must learn that she can get what she wants another day or at another job or with another person. Women must be encouraged to move on as well as to stay the course."

And some of it is great nonsense. "Each woman must understand that women have probably been internalizing sexist values for thousands of years; this value structure cannot disappear immediately. This means that no individual woman is responsible for solving this immense problem by herself, or even in her lifetime. I would like women to understand that the practice of sisterhood is a psychological and ethical discipline." Huh?

HOW ABOUT THE "ethical discipline" that says people should try to be better human beings, whatever their gender, and we should be working to inculcate good character into our children of both sexes? After all, doesn't being fully human, and capable of sin, mean being capable of goodness too? Which really is the inescapable, greatest weakness of *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman.* Having suddenly discovered what the rest of us have always known—that women can in fact be superbly nasty to each other—Chesler then seems determined to put virtually every woman into the fully evil, conniving stepsister category. Which in turn may say a lot more about her world than the world the rest of us inhabit.

Because so many women have stories like mine: more than a half-dozen friends from high school to whom I'm still close some twenty (cough) years later, who aren't afraid to say, "I totally disagree with you," and then put aside whatever the disagreement was, who speak about each other "behind their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

backs"—but only with the most positive things to say. Close friendships with several other delightful, intelligent, warm, and supportive women friends and mentors whom I trust and enjoy, and acquaintances with many more who fit the same description.

I even got along terrifically with my mom, for every one of the thirty-two years I was blessed to know her. (She may have thought, rightly, that many girls excelled at manipulation. But at the same time she adored her daughters whom, along with her sons, she wholly encouraged to become people of character. And, she prized her many quality women friends.)

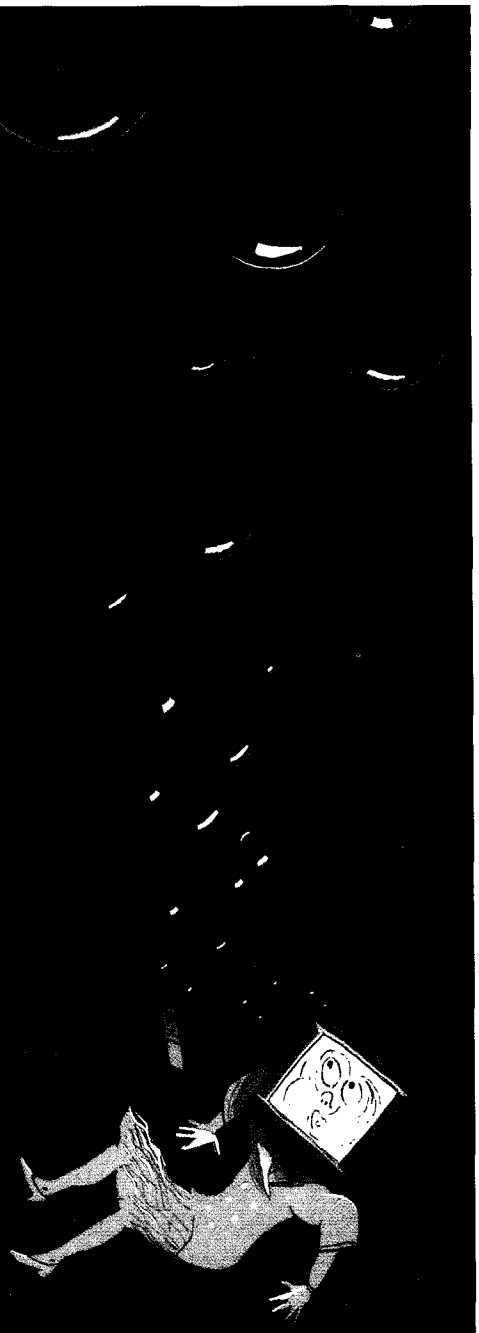
Yes, I've seen the dark side of women. Though I'd prefer to think otherwise, I know I've been the dark side myself. It's no surprise to any of us who see women as human, no more and no less, that the dark side is or can be there. But I certainly don't populate my life with the kind of she-monsters that Chesler describes (assuming she's even describing them fairly). Why does she? Why would anybody?

This book is important because, as a leading feminist, Chesler is here something of a "whistle-blower" when it comes to truths about women that the feminists would much rather gloss over. Yet in almost universally savaging women, the very thing she accuses our sex of doing so exquisitely, she seems to be moving women as a gender from "hero" to "villain" status. Such broad group-based descriptions are not only equally absurd—they are equally dehumanizing. ◆

Betsy Hart is raising four young children—including three girls—to be, she hopes, human beings. In her spare time she writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Scripps Howard News Service.

The Pajama Party That Failed

Oxygen was supposed to be a breath of fresh air for women. *Shannon James* explains why the ratings-starved network is gasping.



AWHILE BACK, I flipped on the TV and came across a hilarious *Saturday Night Live* takeoff of C-SPAN, the public affairs network that broadcasts congressional hearings and panel discussions. The skit, entitled *She-Span*, featured strident, syntactically challenged female panelists prattling on about nuclear weapons and the war on terror. The hostess, May Lee, speculated on why a country might go nuclear: "What is it going to come down to? You wear the wrong color sweater and you're gonna be nuked? I mean, what is going on?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As the show broke for commercials, it dawned on me: *She-Span* is a real political roundtable, not a parody. Horrified, I continued to watch and discovered that the segment was part of the daily *Pure Oxygen* talk show airing exclusively on Oxygen. You know—Oxygen, that cable-for-chicks network that relentlessly promotes an imperceptible idea of femininity that all women supposedly share. Their motto celebrates "unleashing the power of women to do great things." Remember the Oxygen ad showing a nursery full of newborn babies in little pink caps? The babies rebelliously throw their caps into the air, while one little fist is raised in a clenched baby-girl-power salute. In the background, Helen Reddy's song soars: "I am strong, I am invincible, I am woman." Reddy's lyrics don't apply to infants, but Oxygen aims to pique adult female interest enough to get viewers to bond in sisterly solidarity.

Oxygen Media debuted on February 2, 2000 (02/02, get it?) and was supposed to be a breath of fresh air. It was created by Geraldine Laybourne (the matriarch of Nickelodeon and arguably the most powerful woman in cable television); the team of Tom Werner, Marcy Carsey, and Caryn Mandabach (the trio who created *The Cosby Show* and *Roseanne*); and Oprah Winfrey. Convinced (despite statistics showing otherwise) that female audiences are "underserved," the company's founders aimed to "create a new network that will focus on women and treat us like the busy, smart, and complex people we are."

At its inception, Oxygen, which has financial backing from such giants as AOL, was only available in a paltry ten million homes. Two years later, Oxygen is still gasping along, trailing well behind rival Lifetime ("Television for Women"), which pipes into eighty-five million homes and ranks first in prime-time ratings among basic cable networks. Despite a rocky start, Oxygen shows unwavering confidence in its inevitable success, believing the network offers something "Wifetime" television, as Lifetime is derisively known, doesn't: intelligent, original programming instead of sitcom re-runs and made-for-TV movies that consistently portray women as hapless victims.

Laybourne christened the network "Oxygen" because she believes that in today's frenetic society every woman needs to take a deep breath. To drive home the point, Oxygen's daily programming cycle begins with *Inhale*, a yoga class, and ends with *Exhale*, a talk show hosted by Candice Bergen. Though Laybourne has dismissed Lifetime as television "for the viewer who likes to be passively entertained," and gears her sassier network toward active professionals, any "smart and complex" woman might easily confuse the two networks.

Oxygen's programming generally follows two themes: Love and Fashion, presumably reflecting Oxygen's commitment to all things female. After all, says Oxygen, women "want to shop." (Oxygen swears by statistics, insisting that women comprise 85 percent of consumer spending.) *Pure Oxygen* frequently devotes segments to fashion, and the ubiquitous, outrageous Isaac Mizrahi pops up weekly to host a show on which he does makeovers with models and designs dresses for movie stars, all of whom are of course good friends.

Tracey Ullman hosts a risqué show called *Tracey Ullman's Visible Panty Lines* which promises that she—and her celebrity guests—will take "an irreverent look at personal style" and "debunk the mystique behind the world of high fashion." Racy Tracey asks provocative questions such as: "What's your favorite color for underwear?" and zooms in on guests' childhood photos "to illustrate their personal style." The "let's do a makeover" show really just features a lot of yapping, mostly from the once-funny hostess.

If women become bored by clothes and makeup, however, Oxygen offers plenty of proactive romance to fill the void. The network's latest inspiration, *eLOVE*, promises to entertain its female audience with "portraits of couples whose liaisons bring new meaning to the term 'love connection.'" Voyeuristic camera crews follow women (and

Though mildly entertaining, such programming raises the question of whether Oxygen has achieved its mission of empowering women. Nielsen ratings indicate that women simply aren't watching.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

men) busy "flirting and falling in love on the web," listen in on their phone calls, and then tag along as the couple travels absurd distances to take "the big step of meeting for the first time." Though uncomfortably reminiscent of Darva Conger—the bitter victor of *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?*—these women, according to Oxygen, are "taking control of their love lives."

For women who crave even edgier fare, Oxygen showcases "pop culture icon" Carrie Fisher and her in-control-of-their-love-lives celebrity chums. In *Conversations from the Edge with Carrie Fisher*, Carrie curls up in a chair and interviews her famous friends while the audience "eavesdrops," as Oxygen promo material puts it. Any Lifetime damsel-in-distress movie has to be more entertaining than an hour of listening to Carrie whine with Melanie Griffith or Courtney Love about their dysfunctional families, their drug days, and Hollywood's unfairness to—no, discrimination against—women over forty.

OXYGEN CARRIES the stereotype of woman as gossip to a new level via the "stripe." The stripe runs along the bottom of the screen, and every so often messages appear to enhance or clarify what's going on above—in case "smart and complex" women need a written explanation of on-screen action. Sometimes the stripe delivers details about the actors themselves: "Alex first studied political science, but then switched to the theater program," and "To keep in top physical shape, Charles attends the gym every day." Just as the website promotes Oxygen's shows, the stripe often plugs the site: "Having problems with your spouse? Go to *thriveonline.com* for suggestions." "Want to chat about *Kate & Allie*? Go to *oxygen.com*." The stripe doesn't just educate women, it urges them to take meaningful action.

Unfortunately, even Oxygen's own stable of action heroines isn't all we would hope for. *Women & the Badge*, though not about love or fashion, is another example of a programming attempt that doesn't quite succeed. *COPS* fans will be disappointed by this documentary-style "reality show" about real women in law enforcement: Despite dramatic background music, there's just no action. One episode features an Alaskan state trooper as she checks to make sure moose hunters' licenses are current. Switch to Memphis: A female officer enters an abandoned-looking shack to find three kids unsupervised. She takes them to Child Protective Services. These cops' lives may be noble, but they don't make for good TV.

And this brings us to Oxygen's latest challenge: As the realities of cable programming—and dismal ratings—have set in, Oxygen has scrambled to alter its initial plan of presenting solely original shows. Some knock Lifetime for its incessant repeats of *Golden Girls* and *Designing Women*, but Oxygen now offers equivalent hours of droll *Cybill* and *Kate & Allie* repeats, not to mention an endless loop of *Xena, Warrior Princess*, which oddly enough has become its flagship program. After all, says Oxygen, Xena "battles barbarians, overcomes oppressors, and defeats demigods. What better home for the smartest, toughest, sexiest fictional female than Oxygen?"

Still, who's to say Oxygen's sitcoms don't address relevant issues facing most women today? *Cybill*, claims Oxygen, confronts women's issues "from a realistic and fresh perspective." Take menopause: In a recent episode, Cybill delivers her own Vagina monologue to an aggrieved male waiter while dining out: "Just say it out! Period, period, period! No way am I becoming invisible! I am gonna become one loud, brassy, in-your-face menopause mama!" She then strips off her shirt. How's that for an Oxygen woman? (Incidentally, for the alcoholic housewife who whiles away the hours watching *Cybill* reruns, the stripe helpfully provides the recipes for the beverages Cybill and her sidekick, Mary Ann, quaff.)

THOUGH MILDLY entertaining, such programming raises the question of whether Oxygen has achieved its mission of empowering women. Nielsen ratings indicate that women simply aren't watching. In fact, no one is. Numbers show that in the top ten cable markets, Oxygen achieved a pitiable 0.17 average prime-time rating—about 12,867 homes out of 7.5 million, and 0.08 average for a full day. In fact, the network is actually watched in less than 0.1 percent of the nearly forty million homes it reaches. It appears that "underserved" women are breathing just fine on their own.

Oxygen's public affairs programming condescends to women, and the network can't possibly compete with chick shows like *Friends*, *ER*, and *Law & Order*, which consistently place in the top five most-watched shows every week and draw at least twenty million viewers each. Even Oprah's recent promise to bring her own prime-time show to the network this fall is unlikely to inflate Oxygen's numbers.

Though Oxygen persists in its attempt to create a pink ghetto for the "sisterhood," it's to women's credit that they're not moving in. For the sake of said sisterhood, Oxygen's pajama-party founders should take the network off the air. ◆

Shannon James is a writer living in Washington, D.C.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Becky Sharp Comes to America

Judy Bachrach shows how fallen editrix Tina Brown is the reincarnation of Thackeray's seductive, social-climbing heroine.

MOST OF MY LIFE I've wanted to write *Vanity Fair*—the novel by William Makepeace Thackeray; in fact, I recall reading it in Rome (for about the twentieth time) during eleven hours of labor, until foreseen circumstances put an end to that amusement. What could I tell the hospital nuns who hovered around my bed, perplexed that I was neglecting my breathing exercises in favor of this page-turner? "But she had never been a girl," Thackeray wrote about Becky Sharp, his archetype of feminine shrewdness and social manipulation. I longed to leap out of my hospital bed and meet someone exactly like that, a person devoted exclusively to self-advancement. And, I am sorry to say, I never ever did.

Instead, I wrote about her. In the summer of 1999, Tina Brown, a crafty and implacably ambitious English woman who had come to the New World to try her luck and become the most famous magazine editor in the world, left the helm of the *New Yorker* to start her own publication. It had always been a bad idea to put her in charge of a literary magazine, anyway. Tina, I realized at once, possessed a number of promising Sharpesque characteristics. "I was never young," she informed people. "I was born thirty." True to her nature, the new magazine was intended to be a lot less literary than the *New Yorker*. It was to be called *Talk*, but nobody back then seemed to have the vaguest notion what kind of magazine it would turn out to be. Nobody, Tina included, ever would either, but how was I supposed to guess that at the time?

Of course anyone reflecting on the rapid rise and then the dizzying downward trajectory of the fictional Becky Sharp might have drawn certain conclusions. But back then I was easily influenced, as vulnerable as anyone to buzz—"buzz" being Tina's favorite word, one she lassoed in the service of her many incarnations. It was buzz that cantilevered Tina out of dull old Britain into the United States; buzz that brought her to the Condé Nast empire in 1984, where she took over the stewardship of the failing magazine *Vanity Fair*, and summoned to her famous parties all the would-be buzzers. And it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was, finally, buzz that would eventually be her undoing. In her Oxford days, Tina had majored in Victorian literature; she might have been expected to glean certain moral lessons from what she read. However, she was an indifferent student, then as now, and what lessons she absorbed from her nineteenth-century studies were selective. Whatever Becky wants, Becky gets. It was a simple formula, and it worked for a very long time.

In Tina's Oxford days, for example, there were quite a few men vulnerable to her charms. I am using the word "charms" here euphemistically, although it would be wrong to assume she was blandly promiscuous. All of Tina's targets were well chosen, sometimes from afar. "Who's that?" she inquired of one beau, spying an odd Dickensian figure in a frock coat.

"That's Lord Neidpath," she was told. Within a week, it was observed, the two were lovers, although Lord Neidpath would later recall their relationship with a distinct lack of fervor. "Let's say it was clear the career was going to come before anything. If one wasn't going to fit in with her career, one wasn't going to remain popular with her for very long." In short order, Neidpath reflected, Tina dumped him and took up with the writer Martin Amis: "It was obvious," he told me bitterly, "that he was going places."

Other discarded beaux echoed similar sentiments all over Britain, a country where untrammeled ambition has never received a particularly warm reception. Tina's penchant for trading up at the drop of a title (or, for that matter, a book contract) was considered decidedly *déclassé*. Had she been born wealthy or, better still, aristocratic such slights might have been forgiven. But like her fictional antecedent Ms. Sharp, who possessed from the start, as Thackeray tells us, "the dismal precocity of poverty," she was considered unfit for bigger things by reason of parentage.

Tina was by no means born poor. But she inherited from her parents the dismal precocity of thwarted dreams. The daughter of the gentlemanly B-movie producer George Hambley Brown (*The Chiltern Hundreds* and *Terror from Under the House*), who retired, when the jig was up, to Spain, Tina spent the better part of her early years attempting to compensate for deficiencies of that paternal career. From her mother, Bettina, she acquired more particular talents: how to throw massive parties on a budget.

For herself, young Tina was not without abilities. She was a fine early writer, a wicked mimic. She knew, without having to be reminded, who to stroke—Princess Margaret, Kingsley Amis, Dudley Moore—and who to choke (anyone she didn't need). Becky Sharp possessed these very same qualities, but as the product of a Victorian writer, her efforts were confined to the social arena, where she excelled. On receiving a letter revealing that her aristocratic father-in-law had died, Becky's first act is to jump and shout "Hurray!" while waving the sad note around her head. She and her husband have been left nothing in the old man's will, but undaunted, she has plans: "I mean that Lady Jane shall present me at Court next year. I mean that your brother shall give you a seat in Parliament, you stupid old creature," she informs her dull-witted husband. "And that you shall be an Irish Secretary or a West Indian Governor or a Treasurer or a Consul, or some such thing."

Tina, luckier and in some ways more modern, was permitted a more expansive landscape. At twenty-five, she was offered the editorship of *Tatler*, a London society rag teeming with duchesses in disastrous yellow satin and damp-eyed earls on horseback. Within months these unfortunates were replaced by pot-smoking parvenus and titled babes in Manolo Blahniks. Circulation tripled—and, not coincidentally, Tina was by then living with the catch of the day, Harold Evans.

How to explain Harry Evans, once the dashing and noble editor of the *Sunday Times*, and now. . . . Well, now, someone who, unlike Tina, needs explaining. To start with, at the time of their early courtship, Harry was in his private life not all that noble: Enid Evans, mother of their three children, was still his wife, and by all accounts most unhappy about his defection to a woman twenty-five years his junior. But Harry was indubitably someone special. To call him the Ben Bradlee of his day is to belittle his accomplishments. It was Harry's newspaper that broke the Thalidomide scandal, a truly formidable achievement in a country of entrenched power and ruthless libel laws; it was he who insisted on revealing to the British public exactly how the drug had been marketed to pregnant mothers, resulting in scores of deformed children. Young reporters worshipped Harry. Women adored him. Tina got him.

They were married, not coincidentally, at Grey Gardens, the summer home of Ben Bradlee and his much younger, extravagantly blonde wife, Sally Quinn. That was in 1981. Months later Harry was out of a job—fired from the *Times* of London by Rupert Murdoch. Gone were his family, his position, and fame in a society that resolutely turned against him. In their place was Tina Brown. You could say, with justice, that like Thackeray's adventuress, Tina harbored grand hopes of being presented at Court—only her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vision of what constituted a royal audience went far beyond anything Becky ever dreamed of. By 1984, all her friends were advised to start spreading the news. That was the year she turned up in New York, the queen of *Vanity Fair*. By her side was Harry, less royal, in search of an American job.

"Harry was Harry," the British publisher Lord Weidenfeld once told me. "Tina was a buccaneer." Of all the epithets anyone ever offered, this seemed to me the most apt. Those on whom Tina depended for support early in her American incarnation—a long list that included Nancy Reagan, Pat Buckley, Nan Kempner, and the socialite Gayfryd Steinberg whose career proved shorter than Harry's—were coddled within the pages of *Vanity Fair*, its pages perfumed with the scent of money and the language of self-abasement.

Much of this language was, I'm afraid, Tina's own. "In a future episode of my script," Tina wrote, "Gayfryd Steinberg, literary lion, hallowed benefactress, grande dame, receives excellent notices as the year 2025's Brooke Astor." (It is just as well that the author never took up work as a psychic. Fourteen years after those lines were written, the fortunes of Gayfryd and her greenmailing husband Saul declined to such a degree that the couple were forced to hawk their penthouse triplex, along with sixty-one Old Masters. However, by that time, Tina of course didn't know them anymore.) Tina was not entirely unaware of her knack for self-advancement, nor the literary antecedent who inspired it. Her final gift to Si Newhouse, the head of the Condé Nast empire, was an early edition of Thackeray's novel.

Conversely, those who were unlikely to be of substantial use to her were thrown without a qualm to the dogs. Princess Diana and her husband Charles ("Pussy-whipped from here to eternity," in Tina's felicitous phrase), Nicaraguan strongmen and Haitian dictators, the literary musings of her erstwhile friend Sally Quinn, savaged in the pages of *Vanity Fair*—all these were fodder, taken up or discarded as Tina thought fit. Magazine writers met with depressingly similar treatment. On the one hand, they were the best-paid hacks in the business: Thanks to Tina, $150,000 salaries were not unusual. On the other, they had about as much job security as an Enron auditor. Their fortunes advanced or declined depending on the fluttery trajectory of her whims.

WELL, LET ME AMEND THAT. For a while, during the better part of the 1990s in fact, the fortunes of many, many writers rested on one couple. This was when the career of Harry Evans was temporarily revived: He ran Random House for seven problematic years (until his profligacy got the better of corporate profits), while his eager young wife moved from *Vanity Fair* to editing the *New Yorker*. Of the twenty-six books that were excerpted or reproduced in the *New Yorker* in 1996, over half hailed from Random House. Imagine the exuberance of those writers who were thus twice blessed. Ponder the degree of independence manifested by recipients of two fat paychecks from two fat publishing outlets—or the anguished jealousy of their rivals. If you didn't hear a lot of criticism of Tina Brown in those days from traditionally doughty journalists—and believe me, you didn't—there was a good reason behind such uncharacteristic restraint.

And so we come now to *Talk*, Tina's last, most fitful venture. It was a really terrible magazine, its purpose, as ever, to promote the ambitions of its creator rather than appease the curiosity of its readers. Once again those she needed were admirably feted: the heirs of Rupert Murdoch, the wives of advertisers, the children of Al Gore whose presidential ambitions she and Harry nourished. This is not, however, entirely why it failed. *Talk* failed because, quite simply, people got fed up with Tina. This is a harsh assessment, but true. Becky Sharp was repeating herself, only this time on cheap paper with far cheaper writers. She had become, in other words, a downmarket bore.

It is accepted wisdom these days that the press was out to "get" Tina from the moment she stepped out of the shelter of the lavish Condé Nast empire and launched the new magazine with the more meager backing of Harvey Weinstein, emperor of Miramax and the flinty old Hearst Corporation. Indeed, the person who expresses such sentiments most often is Tina herself. She had, she explains, fired too many writers, rejected too many bad stories, made too many enemies. Si Newhouse was out to ruin her, she claimed, as was Graydon Carter, her successor at *Vanity Fair*. Then Osama bin Laden came along and—as final proof of his fiendishness—dashed the magazine's remaining hopes. Or so Tina claimed, insisting that bin Laden had, foremost among his transgressions, pulverized the advertising budgets of the six or so souls still willing to try their luck in *Talk*.

As it happens, I am in a pretty good position to judge the merits of such excuses, since I launched my research for a dual biography of Tina and Harry by phoning a lot of journalists who knew them well. All this took place in 2000, well after Tina had left her perches at Condé Nast. And there is only one way to describe their general reaction to my pleas for interviews. Terror. Stark, unadulterated terror. No writer I ever met was out to ***Continued on page 28***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Disarming Women

An iconoclastic, new brand of "individualist feminism"—ifeminism—suggests that abused women might do well to put their trust in Smith & Wesson. ***Richard W. Stevens, Hugo Teufel III,*** and ***Matthew Y. Biscan*** agree.

Since 1968 Americans who face criminal attack have been advised to "dial 911" and rely upon the emergency police response for protection. Indeed, according to a study of 911 calls, "the public has built up extraordinary levels of expectation and reliance on the [911] system's effectiveness." Meanwhile, a story in *U. S. News & World Report* magazine in 1996, headlined, "This is 911, please hold," reported that "in recent years, many law enforcement executives have questioned the entire foundation on which 911 is built—the idea that police can stop crimes by responding rapidly to citizens' 'emergency' calls."

In practice, does dialing 911 actually protect crime victims? Fewer than 5 percent of all calls dispatched to police are made soon enough for officers to stop a crime or arrest a suspect. Even when it functions at its best, the 911 system cannot adequately protect crime victims. When citizens rely solely on 911 and police protection from imminent criminal attacks, their risks of harm increase because of slow police response times, clogged emergency telephone lines, and occasional partial or total 911 system outages. More striking is the position of the law in nearly every state: The police have no legal obligation to protect citizens from crime.

In one landmark California case, a woman separated from her husband, and he retaliated with threats and violence. Over a period of a year, Ruth Bunnell had called the San Jose police at least twenty times to report that her estranged husband, Mack, had violently assaulted her and her two daughters. Mack had even been arrested for one assault.

One day Mack called Ruth to say that he was coming to her house to kill her. Ruth called the police for immediate help. The police department, according to court documents, "refused to come to her aid

Joan Crawford in "Johnny Guitar," 1953

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at that time and asked that she call the department again when Mack Bunnell had arrived." Forty-five minutes later Mack arrived and stabbed Ruth to death. Responding to a neighbor's call, the police eventually came to Ruth's house—after she was dead.

Ruth's estate sued the police for negligently failing to protect her. The California appeals court held that the city of San Jose was shielded from the suit because of a state statute and because there was no "special relationship" between the police and Ruth—the police had not started to help her, and she had not relied on any promise that the police would help. Case dismissed.

In a particularly brutal Washington, D.C., case, three women discovered that the law promises them no protection against brutal attack by strangers. All three women were sleeping in their rooms during the early morning hours when two men broke down the back door of their three-floor house in northwest Washington. The men first entered the second-floor room and violently assaulted one woman there.

From the third-floor room they shared, the other two women heard the screams and commotion and called the police. The call was dispatched as "Code 2" priority, which has a lower priority than "Code 1" given to crimes in progress. Four police cruisers responded to the call within a few minutes. One of the police cars drove through the alley without stopping to check the back door and then went around to the front of the house. A second police officer knocked on the front door but left when he got no answer. All officers left the scene just five minutes after they had arrived.

The two women, who had escaped to an adjoining roof, then climbed back into their room and called the police a second time because they still heard screams. The duty officer assured them that help was on the way. That second call was logged as "investigate the trouble," but no officers were dispatched.

A woman with a firearm can credibly threaten and deter an attacker of any size, shape, or strength.

Minutes later, the women thought the police were in the house and called down for them. There were no policemen there, but the attackers heard the screams and came upstairs. All three women were kidnapped, taken to one of the attacker's houses, and raped, robbed, beaten, and sexually abused.

The three women sued the District of Columbia and the officers for negligently failing to provide police protection, but their complaint was dismissed. Under D.C. law, "official police personnel and the government employing them are not generally liable to victims of criminal acts for failure to provide adequate police protection." This rule "rests upon the fundamental principle that a government and its agents are under no general duty to provide public services, such as police protection, to any particular individual citizen." Many state courts follow and apply this same rule.

The city of Sonoma, California, recently settled a federal civil rights lawsuit by paying one million dollars to the children of a battered and murdered woman whom the police failed to protect against her violent ex-husband. This lawsuit alleged that the police denied the woman her civil rights by failing to protect her. Although this settlement does not create a legal precedent, it does signal that city governments may see holes forming in their legal immunity.

But the inadequacy of the 911 system (and also of the protective orders that many women seek against abusers) suggests that self-defense may be a better option for many women and other potential victims of crime.

On average, men are physically bigger and stronger than women are. Male batterers of women, for example, are on average forty-five pounds heavier and four to five inches taller than their female victims. With serious martial arts training, a woman can fight off an unarmed man in many cases, but she likely still faces a disadvantage if attacked by more than one man or an armed man.

A woman with a firearm, however, can credibly threaten and deter an attacker of any size, shape, or strength. Even though weaker and unskilled in the use of firearms, she can sometimes protect herself with a sidearm without firing a shot. In more than 92 percent of defensive gun uses, the defender succeeds by firing only a warning shot or never firing the gun at all.

A sidearm can "equalize" physical disparity between a woman and her attacker. For a battered woman, the equalization can make all the difference, because such a woman is likely to be prepared for an abuser's attack. Typically the battered woman can sense cues of impending violence from her male partner (in the home) more quickly and accurately than a person who has not been abused. Because she can prepare, she can more effectively use the sidearm to deter and prevent a looming violent episode.

Although a woman can overcome a male attacker's physical advantages with a firearm, social and psychological factors can weaken her willingness to pre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pare and defend herself by using force. Some argue that American women generally have a victim mentality because of sex-role stereotyping. In our society, nonaggressiveness is characteristic of what is supposed to be "normal" heterosexual femininity. Male rapists look for the weak and fearful "damsel in distress." The more stereotypically feminine and passive a woman is, the more likely that she will be a victim of aggression. The same nonaggressive woman is unlikely to learn self-defense techniques and obtain defense tools.

Self-defense instructors have reported seeing "physically strong women who are at first so frightened of violence and of fighting that they cower and cry uncontrollably even in a simulated self-defense situation." Even female police officers sometimes need extra training to be willing to fight back against aggressors. This apparently widespread fear of conflict makes women targets of rape and violence.

"Crime prevention" programs that teach only nonviolent resistance actually reinforce the weak/passive female stereotyping. The Maryland Community Crime Prevention Institute, for example, reportedly has told women that martial arts training would not decrease the chances of injuries in an attack. Instead, the institute has advised women to struggle, cry hysterically, and pretend to faint, be sick, pregnant, or insane. Sexual stereotyping that discourages women from defending themselves can be deadly. Studies have shown that women who resist and fight back are less likely to be harmed than those women who submit passively.

Some might admit that firearm ownership could have prevented the attacks discussed above, yet they may nevertheless oppose ownership of firearms in general because of their belief that gun ownership increases the total level of violence in society. We must ask, therefore, whether self-defense through firearms is beneficial not only for battered women or women under imminent threat of violence but also for society as a whole.

Opponents of the private possession and use of firearms for defense assert that greater numbers of firearms mean more unlawful killings. Put another way, they claim that any increase in gun ownership results in an increase in murders. The facts show otherwise: The overwhelming majority of gun owners never hurt anyone with their firearms. Increasing the number of firearms available to peaceable, nonviolent citizens —the vast majority of the population —will not convert these citizens into criminals.

Homicide studies dating back to the nineteenth century show that murderers, far from being normal people who "lost control," are extreme aberrants whose life histories feature prior felonies, substance abuse, and/or psychopathology. "The vast majority of persons involved in life-threatening violence," wrote Delbert S. Elliott in the *University of Colorado Law Review*, "have a long criminal record and many prior contacts with the justice system." These facts appear in homicide studies so consistently that, according to an article in *Homicide Studies*, they "have now become criminological axioms" about the "basic characteristics of homicide." In short, everyday people don't commit homicide—violent criminals do.

While gun ownership rates increased substantially and the number of privately owned guns nearly doubled between 1973 and 1992, the homicide rate in 1992 was 10 percent lower than the 1973 rate. It is even lower today despite an increase in gun ownership. The homicide rates over this period rose and fell with no correlation with gun ownership rates. Despite the increase in firearms, there was no correlation with homicide rates in general nor an increase in the percentage of murders committed specifically with firearms. In 1973, 68.2 percent of all murders were committed with guns. In 1992, the figure was 68.2 percent. Contrary to the gun control rhetoric, more guns do not equal more murders.

Some of the arguments for gun control and against armed self-defense play directly on sex-role stereotypes of women. One argument is that using a sidearm requires a lot of training, so the gun is more dangerous to the average citizen than a deterrent to the criminal.

This argument emphasizes incompetence and lack of training as a reason not to be armed. Women are more likely to be considered incompetent and untrained with firearms. Some women may also see themselves as incompetent and physically weak. This argument points to leaving the job of protecting women to the men (typically) in uniform who are experts. Yet Lee J. Hicks noted in *Police Chief* magazine that he found that civilian women with two hours of instruction could learn to shoot a gun as accurately as could police academy cadets in simulated real-life situations.

Another argument concerns fears of gun "take-away." According to this rationale, the criminal can wrest the gun out of the hands of the physically weaker woman. The armed woman can too easily be converted into an unarmed woman at the mercy of her now-armed attacker. The statistics that back up this argument come from cases where police officers in the line of duty have lost their guns to criminals. But the analogy is faulty. Police officers must approach, subdue, and take suspects into custody.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The officers must therefore come close enough for the suspects to be able to grab the guns. Personal- and home-defense situations are quite different; they do not require the defender to get close to the attacker. Indeed, the opposite is true: The defender wants to keep the attacker at a distance, and that requires no special strength except the gun. A woman strong enough to shoot is strong enough to keep an attacker out of reach of her gun.

Sayoko Blodgett-Ford, author of an article headlined "Do Battered Women Have a Right to Bear Arms?" in the *Yale Law and Policy Review*, recounts the story of a California woman whose husband shattered her jaw while she held their baby. After she had her jaw rebuilt at the hospital, she tried to press charges against him, but police and county mental health workers persuaded her not to because the husband had agreed to get counseling. After two sessions, even the counselor refused to meet with him because of death threats.

Despite a restraining order, the estranged husband continued to prowl around his wife's house, sleeping in her yard and calling her constantly by phone. When the police refused to arrest him for violating the restraining order, she decided to buy a gun. While she waited the fifteen days required by California law to get the gun, he repeatedly assaulted her at home and at work. Once she obtained the sidearm, however, and her abuser knew she was armed, the assaults stopped. He continued lesser insults, such as stealing her mail and harassing her by phone, but the physical attacks stopped.

To decide whether to support or oppose private ownership of firearms, individualist feminists should consider the options for self-defense, particularly in the case of domestic violence. The data, logic, and human experience all show that potential crime victims who are in imminent danger of violence are better protected by individual self-defense options than by government laws and centralized police response. Individual women in peril quite frequently fare better when they develop skill and confidence in the carrying and using of defensive firearms. Victim disarmament ("gun control") laws that discourage women from developing the skills and using defensive firearms actually heighten the risks of criminal violence that women face. Such laws place women at a disadvantage against violent men and run against the feminist goal of equal treatment under the law. ◆

Richard W. Stevens is a lawyer who specializes in preparing legal briefs for trial and appellate court cases and is the author of Dial 911 and Die. *Hugo Teufel III is an attorney in public practice. Matthew Y. Biscan is a lawyer in Denver, Colorado. This article is excerpted with permission from the new book from The Independent Institute (independent.org)* Liberty for Women: Freedom and Feminism in the Twenty-First Century *edited by Wendy McElroy (Ivan R. Dee).*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

"get" Tina Brown. No one dared, even then. James Atlas, the *New Yorker* contributor and biographer of Saul Bellow, unblushingly promised he was prepared to say "only nice things about Tina"—and then phoned back to cancel even that lame proposition. Simon Winchester, another author (who once worked for Harry) dispensed with the formality of actually canceling and simply chose not to show up, leaving me drowning at our proposed breakfast site in a sea of orange juice and self-pity. My chattiest source terminated our two-year relationship of interviews and incessant emailing at the precise moment Tina signed him on to work at *Talk*: "She is a very dangerous woman," he concluded, "and I don't want you using anything I've ever said."

So if Tina and *Talk* went down the chute, as indeed they both did, it was not because of happenstance or bad luck or because of subtle alterations in the prevailing zeitgeist (Tina's second favorite word). The zeitgeist of today isn't, alas, all that different from what it was yesterday. It's the same old geist of self-advancement and self-promotion that has always propelled everyone, victors and victims alike.

Nonetheless, there comes a moment in most lives when our very worst parts suddenly call unseemly attention to themselves. This is the time for self-reflection. It was this quality that was always conspicuously missing from Tina. It was never of any real use to her, and besides, to indulge it would have turned her away from the main business of life—which was to blame others for those flaws she possessed and was helpless to do much about. It has left her very much alone these days.

"Whenever Becky made a little circle for herself with incredible toils and labor, somebody came and swept it down rudely and she had all her work to begin over again," Thackeray wrote at the end of his novel, when his antiheroine was brought low. "It was very hard; very hard; lonely and disheartening." Yes, but what else could Becky do, after all? What new circles may one expect Tina to forge? So many bridges incinerated, so little time.

Never mind. She is an industrious soul with many scores to settle. She will certainly try, whatever it takes.

And then try, and try again. ◆

Judy Bachrach is author of Tina and Harry Come to America *(Free Press).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Correspondence

A Big Hit

I ENJOYED Dave Shiflett's commentary on pacifists, "A Peace of My Mind" [*TWQ* 30]. I fell out of my seat with laughter at his word play when I wasn't enthusiastically nodding my head and poking my husband (who kept moving out of reach) with hearty agreement. Please thank Mr. Shiflett for providing my aerobic workout for the day.

Sabra Park
Cleveland, TN

Our Kind of Guy

I ALWAYS STEAL a march on my wife by "borrowing" her copy of *The Women's Quarterly* as soon as it hits the mailbox. I was taken with Charlotte Hays' Diary "Better Red than Dead," [*TWQ* 26] in which she tells how she became a conservative. There is nothing finer than a conversion experience, be it slow or suddenly on the road to Damascus. The beauty of it is that one can look back at oneself and chuckle.

Keep up the good work. I love your rationality, good humor, and self-confidence. *The Women's Quarterly* should be made required reading in all universities and prisons.

Ted Hirschfield
Via email

We're Driving Her Crazy

I WOULD ACTUALLY have found Christine Stolba's article on women rulers and women and power ["How Do Women Rule?... Just Like Men" *TWQ* 26] interesting if it weren't for the constant sarcastic refrain aimed at feminism. And this is what continually bugs me about your articles. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a journal devoted to women's issues, as yours purports to be, that doesn't feel compelled to trash a whole movement every time it opens its mouth. The tedious, one-note drone is making me crazy.

Colleen Devlin
Via email

Another Diatribe

PLEASE DO NOT DISREGARD this as just another diatribe from your enemies, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminists. I am simply a woman and an historian and an ethicist who is completely appalled that you would in these days dispense such bigotry against Islamic people in your Crusades article ["Hooray for the Crusades!" *TWQ* 31]. I would sincerely like you to cite your historic sources on the Crusades and encourage you to get your facts right before you speak. People of the Arab world, Muslims and non-Muslims, especially women, do not need your voice to further oppress them. Your hate speech should be a crime.

Susan M. Jenssen
Via email

Why Johnny Can't Write

IN RESPONSE to "The Write Stuff" [*TWQ* 28]: Author Christina Hoff Sommers repeatedly observes that boys' handwriting is worse than girls, but she seems far too uninterested in why that is. We discussed this fact—which is frequently enough observed to be commonplace—in my introductory neurobiology class. It is well known that boys' bodies develop more slowly and a little later than girls' do, and it happens that boys' fine motor skills are a little late to catch up as well. When handwriting is taught to students in elementary schools—and it is taught, if not taught brilliantly—it is at an age when most of the girls are ready to learn good lettering, and when most of the boys are not. Old-fashioned, ruler-to-the-wrist discipline would probably help some boys to write better, and continuing to teach and grade handwriting through middle school would probably help most of the rest. What is really needed, though, is neither the fall-back to old methods that Ms. Sommers seems to desire, or the "middle ground" she espouses. The problem of handwrit-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing, like many in basic education, has its solution in our trusting and adapting to neurological and developmental research, and in the recognition that boys and girls learn in different ways, and at different times. For all the crusading that Ms. Sommers does on boys' accounts, it seems that she still believes the problem is that they are rowdy brats. This may well be true, but there is an independent and documented reason why they have a tough time learning their cursive.

Blake Wilson
Yale College, '02

AA: Not like Women's Studies

THANKS for Eric Adler's article on women's studies classes at Duke University [*TWQ* 27]. However, he makes the typical mistakes of popular writers who depict AA meetings as being comprised of a bunch of limp-wristed, touchy-feely, group-gropers.

Has he been to any AA meetings?

Owen Jones
Aiken, SC

Shame, Shame!

I HAVE NEVER been so outraged in my life ["The Return of the Guy," *TWQ* 30]. I have worked for fifteen years, successfully, as a paid firefighter. I am damn proud of it. I have tolerated a lot of garbage from "macho" guys and have lived to tell about it. I have found that generally the men who behaved the worst, mouthed off the loudest were the ones with the biggest "hang-ups" and bruised egos and did the least when it came time to work. The confident men, of which there are many, know how to "curb" their aggression when it comes to behaving like a human being.

Author Charlotte Allen says she'd rather be carried to safety by a strong male firefighter. I have carried men, women, and children out of fires. I feel extremely sorry for Charlotte Allen. She suggests that because no women were "on duty" at the exact moment that the World Trade Center tragedy hit, that somehow it was "only guys" who lost their lives. Did she stop and think of the sheer numbers of MALE firefighters in New York, compared to the number of "women" firefighters employed there—that there are so few, that many times on many shifts a "Woman" might not be on duty? Let me tell you, all firefighters lost a part of themselves that day. Male and Female firefighters, alike. When all off-duty firefighters were told to respond to work, all did respond, male and female alike.

Shame on this magazine. Shame on this author.

In the Line of Duty,
Colleen J. Walz, Captain
City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire

Rosie Colored Glasses

LISA SCHIFFREN'S "Ring Around a Rosie" [*TWQ* 27] was superlative! Her description of the typical Rosie audience was a gem. Likewise, Rosie's worship of Hillary. More than anything else, hero worship of the party leaders is the one thing that I detested over and above everything else in my former life as a liberal. I do not see it in any form nowadays in my right-of-center existence. What a wonderful change; growing up does have its rewards. A tip of the hat to Lisa.

George Jackson
Broadview Heights, Ohio

SheThinks

THE INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM proudly announces the publication of ***SheThinks,*** a magazine by and for college students who feel academically isolated and disenchanted with a feminist movement that seems bent on problems instead of solutions. It is a print version of our very successful webzine, ***SheThinks.org.***

School may be out for summer, but fall is quickly approaching. If you know a college student who wishes for common sense over radical ideology, a dash of romance rather than a midnight hook-up, a debate rather than a screaming match, forward her (or him!) a copy of ***SheThinks*** today.

To request a free copy, send us an email at ***SheThinks@iwf.org.***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One last observation . . .

A Few Words about Outfits

Renee A. James ponders a little-studied difference between men and women.

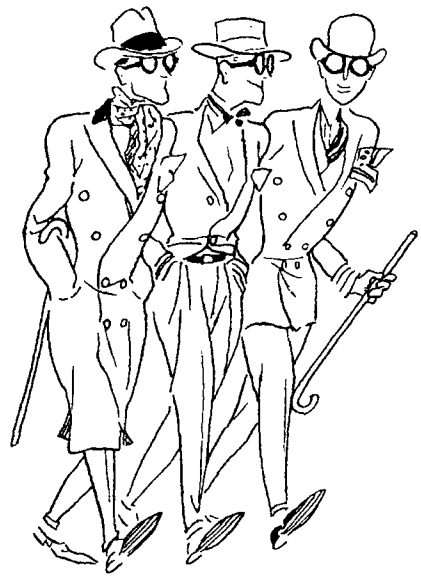
ANDROGYNY will not be complete until we purge one more word from the English language: outfit. When a party or a business meeting or a "something" is coming up, do you always think to yourself, "I need a new outfit"? Or like me, when I realized we might be attending a friend's rehearsal party and his wedding, I immediately thought: "Fun … but now I need two outfits."

Men never buy outfits. They buy a shirt. Done. Or shorts. Or a pair of pants, when they announce the size of their waist in public to God and the clerk and anyone else standing around.

Or men buy a whole suit. And they know, as sure as they know linen will never hold up in July in Pennsylvania, that the suit on the rack will not fit and will absolutely need to be altered to whatever bumps and slumps happen to exist on their bodies.

Women diet when clothing doesn't fit. And feel miserable and horrified about not fitting into their "size." I sometimes wish I had entered a profession that requires a uniform. Any kind: flight attendant, Dunkin' Donuts counter person, brain surgeon, and so on—it doesn't really matter. I'm at the point where I can barely stand the idea of choosing what to wear to work.

Why is it wrong to wear the same thing every day even when you don't have a uniform rule to fall back on? Men do it all the time. Check out any casual office and the men are wearing one of the following: khakis and a blue shirt / a white shirt / a blue and white shirt / a golf shirt in summer.



My own personal mission is to start thinking clothes, not outfits, but it's hard. "Outfit" sounds as feminine as lace or ribbons or control top pantyhose. It's kind of a fun word to use. But we should realize that until women stop referring to our respective wardrobes as outfits, we won't fully take each other seriously as we address the shortfall in profits this quarter at the board meeting or the delay in shipping last month with our clients.

Understand this as surely as you understand which color nail polish looks best with your summer tan: Some woman, in some meeting, some day will listen to you and think, even as you speak your effective business-speak, "Cute outfit!" Or worse, "Yikes! Who's her designer? The San Francisco 49ers?"

It's funny and disturbing at the same time. I love the fact that I can count on someone noticing my outfits, good or bad, and that kind of bonds us somehow. I hate knowing that men never sit in a meeting and wonder where another guy got his tie.

Is this a bad thing? Is it true that we've come a long way, baby, but now we take note of someone's Manola Blahniks instead of her apron? Or can women regularly process two completely distinct thoughts at the same time: "Jeez, Amy is really nailing all those fixed costs that management keeps screaming about, and isn't her oyster white blouse and skirt with the chunky gold necklace a great combination"?

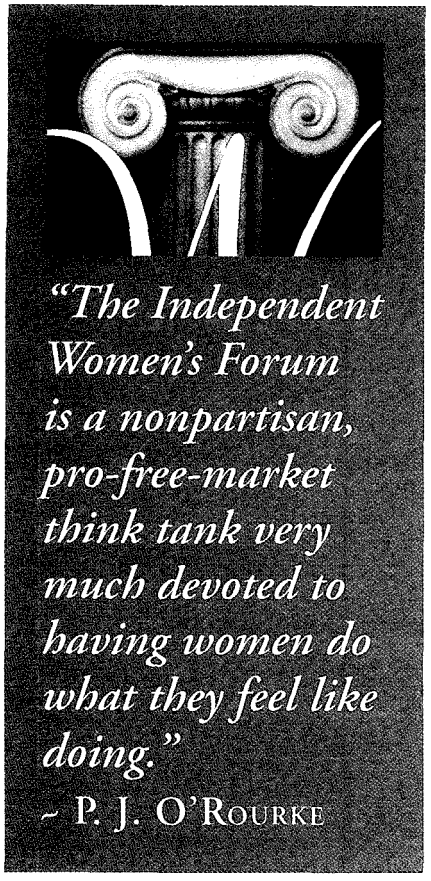
Gloria Steinem notwithstanding, it's no fun to go buy a pair of slacks. The end. You may as well turn me loose in Macy's with a single spotlight above a solitary rack of slacks and cloak the rest of the store in inky blackness. It would be that weird a shopping experience.

It's no accident that Ann Taylor displays the scarves and jewelry and "everything else" right by the checkout: "Do you need a scarf to go with that?" Do I need a scarf?

I have a baby shower coming up this weekend. The peach outfit? Or the khaki skirt / blue blouse outfit? With the black sandals. And the dangle earrings. . . . ◆

Renee A. James is an op-ed columnist for the Morning Call *in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She has an essay in a new humor collection* 101 Damnations *(St. Martin's Press).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


"The Independent Women's Forum is a nonpartisan, pro-free-market think tank very much devoted to having women do what they feel like doing."
~ P. J. O'Rourke

Since 1992, the Independent Women's Forum has been taking on the old establishment of feminist organizations—and winning.

Why has the IWF been so successful? Because the women who make up the IWF are not radical ideologues—they're businesswomen, economists, lawyers, truck drivers, and also mothers. Because the IWF promotes individual responsibility, strong families, limited government, and opportunity—policies that help *all* Americans. Because the IWF, a nonpartisan, nonprofit Washington organization, sponsors speaker events and conferences noted for their provocative and free-ranging debates. And because the IWF publishes *The Women's Quarterly*—an intellectual antidote to political correctness—which syndicated columnist Mona Charen praises as, "My type of women's magazine! With humor and sarcasm but also with warmth and passion, these women offer an intelligent refutation of the leading feminist nonsense that is swallowed so uncritically by the mainstream press."

Why not join us? Check "Yes, I want to support" on the enclosed reply card, and you'll receive a year's subscription to *The Women's Quarterly* as well as our insiders-only newsletter *Ex Femina,* and invitations to our conferences and speeches. Most important, you'll be adding another voice of reason—yours!—to the cultural and political debates of our time.

The Women's Quarterly

Independent Women's Forum
P. O. Box 3058
Arlington, Virginia 22203-0058

Address Correction Requested

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED